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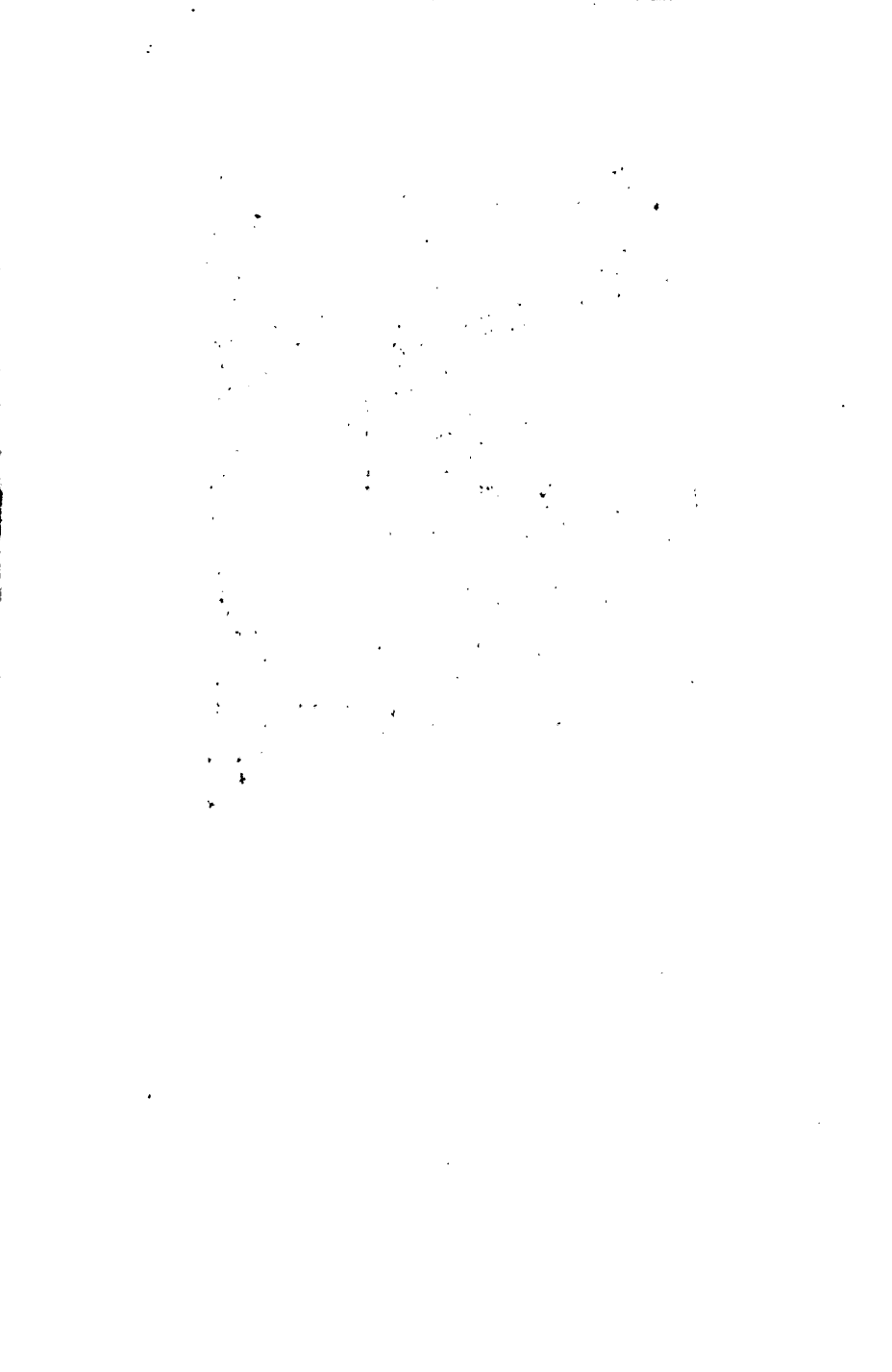
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The Grain Carriers

BY

EDWARD NOBLE

AUTHOR OF

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THIRD IMPRESSION



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SOME WEEKS BEFORE HE MADE
STILL MORE DANGEROUS THE "CONDITIONS"
HE AT THE MOMENT
DEPLORED.

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THE GRAIN CARRIERS.

A PRELUDE

ON BOARD THE *MAGICIAN*.

Dramatis Personæ.

A BOY—generally known as Freddy, but figuring here as Impertinence

A GIRL—Nita Collins, the Captain's daughter.

A MAN—the officer of the watch, Mr Cave.

A Punishment—"Riding the grey mare."

SCENE.—*A ship's deck. Night. The tropics.*

Time—four bells in the first watch. 10 P.M.

A SHIP crept over the sea, silent, beautiful; a picture in silver-point coming up the grey slope from the under-world—a picture on which the stars peeped down.

She moved there slowly, carrying in her hold grain for the people who live and fight and strive in our dim cities; people who have never seen her kind, who have no knowledge of her; people who clamour for bread, who would die if she did not bring it to them; whose rulers care nothing for the processes by which it comes, who are concerned only with the fact that it will come,—

*People like children, crying for the moon;
Rulers like nurses, mothering them with promise.*

And on the ship's deck lived persons who breathed and strove and loved, even as those who awaited the coming of the grain.

South-east trades falling light; the great steel yards of the *Magician* trimmed nearly dead-square; weather clews lifted, and the Southern Cross standing high in heavens, dark and opalescent as the sea lying somnolent to mirror them.

A night of magic beauty. A night unmarred by the rush and moil of a busy world. A night shrouding the power in this monster of the seas swinging lazily up from the south, clothed to the trucks in billowy folds of whiteness.

The clouds look soft in the trades, bales of wool men call them, but in the bright starlight of the tropics the sails look softer. That stark and sombre creation known as the *Magician* seemed fairy-like and wan, a thing of beauty draped in gossamer. Her canvas pulsed with the breath of the southern seas.

It was the first watch, and an officer marched the poop in silence. A man stood at the wheel, another leaned on the capstan forward. A night for sleep. A night to woo man's faculties and close his lids.

Four bells!

Some one struck it; and a voice arose in protest, perhaps in prayer.

"Lights bright and all's well!"

No one contradicted him. The deck was silent, the officer marched; and high on the spanker-boom an effigy, set straddle-legged upon its end, gave voice to his desire—"Thank God for that, anyhow; but I wish it was eight."

A young girl came from the cabin entrance and glanced about her. Nothing moved. Only the sails breathed up there, high in the white starlight. She crept over the doorstep and paused, a picture for the gods.

"Freddy!" she whispered.

A voice came sleepily back in answer—

"Ye-es?"

"Where are you?"

"Here."

"Where's here, stupid?"

The boy rose from his nook and trailed down the grating. He carried his pillow, his bare feet gave forth no sound, the shadow thrown by the break of the poop shrouded him. He drew near, as one does who dares not lift his voice too high. "Here," he reiterated, standing now before this interrupter of the legitimate rest of a youth who desired sleep and had found it. "Here,—and why can't you let a fellow alone?"

"You have no right to sleep in your watch on deck," said the girl.

"And you have no right outside the cabin after eight bells," the boy made answer.

The girl's eyes flashed. They were eyes which had the trick; and now they should have slain Imper-tinence, standing there, hugging a pillow. Still he remained upright. The girl's slipper beat a tattoo on the grating.

"And you will report me?" she threw out expectant.

"Boys don't tattle—it's girls that tattle," Freddy announced with the confidence of sixteen years.

The girl approached. She seemed to be on the point of administering chastisement, but changed her mind and covered her face instead.

"Oh!" she breathed. "That's horrid and mean and cadish. I'd like to . . . to——"

"I know you would," said Freddy.

"What?"

"Tattle of me."

Again the girl covered her eyes and stood in that species of silence known as chilly; though, if the colour of her face as discovered by the lighted alley-way may be taken as evidence, she found it rather hot than cold. She tapped the grating with her small

slipper—a slipper revealing gleams of white flesh which should have been sufficient to induce respect even from sixteen years.

"Mr Cave's on the poop. Why don't you go up and report you found me asleep too?" Impertinence questioned, finding the waiting irksome.

"I never report. I . . ."

"You do. You peached on Philip, and now he's riding the grey mare, and—and I hope you are satisfied."

"I reported Philip! . . . Philip riding the grey mare—oh! what shall I . . ."

"That's it. Now deny it," the boy challenged.

The girl flared.

"I do! It's a story! It's a wicked, wicked story."

"Of course," Impertinence acquiesced, and remained tongue in cheek.

The girl came a step nearer. Her eyes flashed. Her attitude was the attitude of one who intends to slap a face annoyingly thrust out. But again she drew back. The individual deserving punishment was not Freddy, this generally nice boy, who for the moment seemed rude enough to—to sink the ship; the individual deserving punishment was the person who had dared to order another person to ride the grey mare; who had dared to inflict an indignity on the nicest boy. . . . She flung back her hands and faced Impertinence with a new note in her soft young voice.

"Who told you I reported Philip to—to Mr Cave?"

"It doesn't need telling," the boy decided. "It's plain."

"What is?"

"That you told—besides, there's no one else to do it."

"Why should I do it?" came eagerly from the ripe lips.

"Why—oh, because you're in love with Cave and want to spite . . ."

Impertinence arrived at his perihelion. The eyes no longer flashed unaided. A hand shot out and a sounding smack fell on that rather freckled cheek,—a smack which might have been heard by the lad who rode the grey mare, knees at grip; then followed a sudden movement to recross the sill, and the captain's daughter had entered again those quarters whence she had strayed.

Impertinence, it appears, was content to accept the blow. He might indeed have aimed to earn it. He made no attempt at apology or explanation; he just watched the maid's exit, patted his pillow, and returned to doze in that corner he had marked for his own. Life at sixteen has small concern for pats administered by hands which might be made of velvet. Life on board ship desires sleep, even in the watch on deck, and it resents the punishment of a chum who should have shared the solace.

But the girl did not go to her room. She mounted the companion-way and stared from the leeward door at that figure in white ducks, gripping with his knees the hard flanks of his mare.

It was a shame! Inhuman! Cruel, wicked, horrible—*dangerous*! A crescendo of exasperation, a fluttering breast, a quivering lip, then Miss Nita stepped, hands clenched, across to windward, opened the door, and came directly on a man pivoting for the march aft in the wake of the rigging.

The man was Mr Cave, the officer of the watch.

The girl moved upon him so swiftly that it appeared she contemplated annihilation, when in all truth she desired simply to stop him and speak from a position removed from the observation of the boy who rode.

"It's awfully hot downstairs," she ventured, gathering her forces now that she could spring unseen.

The officer saluted. A smile lay on his face, for he, too, was weary of this rather monotonous march on a

night which whispered of sleep. "I am glad to know it," he answered gallantly, "if it gives me the pleasure of your company for a time."

"Oh, but it doesn't," she assured him.

"Nevertheless you are here," he decided, still with a smile—the smile she disliked perhaps more heartily than she knew.

"I came up," she explained, "because it was too hot for anything in my room, and because I wanted to ask you whether you think it's fair to mast-head boys?"

The smile died from the mate's eyes. He looked over his shoulder furtively, or at all events without desiring that Miss Nita should follow him, and found that the jigger-mast and chart-room hid the effigy from her view.

"To mast-head the boys?" he questioned. "What a strange idea!"

"Boys," Miss Nita emphasised. "I have been reading—Peter Simple, you know," the mate did not know, "and they give boys that punishment when they . . ."

"I can't say," the mate broke in, with a fine air of discrimination, "that I quite believe in mast-heading. . . ."

"If they fell asleep, for instance, in their watch on deck," Miss Nita persisted steadily.

The mate accepted the addenda with all gravity. "It depends," he decided, "on whether it is an old trick or a mere accident. I think if I had to act in such a case I should give him an hour at capstan-bar drill, or put him out on the boom——"

"Not on the boom; surely you would not go so far as . . ."

"I should put him on the bowsprit end," said the mate with decision. "The boom, of course, one reserves for more urgent cases."

"Just so," said Miss Nita, demurely preparing her shot; "for it would seem so cowardly to send him on the boom when there is the mast-head and the bowsprit vacant."

"Cowardly?" the officer questioned with lifted brows.

"Well—perhaps it wouldn't be cowardly, but caddish."

"Caddish! Really, isn't that rather worse?"

"Perhaps," said Miss Nita with precision, despite the tension,—“perhaps I ought to have called it spiteful.”

Again the mate demurred. He found it difficult to accept this pronouncement also. “There must be discipline, you know, Miss Nita. We have to maintain discipline somehow, and it is scarcely fair to put our efforts down to spite.”

He laboured under the difficulty that at any moment the girl might see Philip Devine straddling the boom in the starlight. He floundered under the impression that she had not seen, that the question was one of simple coincidence. She was perhaps sixteen years, scarcely seventeen in any case: was it possible that a man could imagine subtlety, especially in her presence?

“I don't think,” Miss Nita hammered in, “that I should ever care to speak to an officer who did that to one of *our* boys.”

The man smiled a trifle shamedly.

“I should pity the officer who made such a blunder,” he ventured.

“Would you?” came the verdict unhesitatingly; “I should pity the boy.”

She turned to go aft. The man's pulses throbbed. He moved beside her, blocking her vision, intent on effacing that effigy on the boom.

But the girl had no intention of seeing, or of being seen. She had shot her arrow. She was content, apparently, to slip into the chart-room and downstairs to her cabin.

Really men are absurdly blind.

The port just over Miss Nita's bunk commanded an excellent view of the boom and its rider. It claimed her attention. She lay down with her face on the pillow and remained there, watching. The mate continued his march. Five minutes he paced up and down the blank deck, staring at the boards; then he halted and gave an order. Philip acknowledged it. He climbed from the grey mare's back, and crossing the poop came in silence to his chum.

But the man on watch continued his march, questioning whether he had effectually managed that rather difficult business of screening.

And the stars winked down upon him, drawing lines in silver on the mirror he faced.

PHASE THE FIRST.—LOADING THE GRAIN.

CHAPTER I.

AT CALEB JEFFERSON'S STORE.

"SAY, stranger, heard the news?"

"News be gol-dolled, it's too hot for news," came the reply from a large man reclining in a chair set deep in shadow.

"That's so—but have you?"

"No—there ain't no news. News is asphyxiated."

"Right."

"Go on—what is it?"

"Lloyd-George hez brought in a Bill to amend the Merchant Shipping Act, and there's hell to pay on 'Change. Premiums hev riz."

"You don't say!"

"Yes, sirc—an' there's war betwixt our two friends Collins and Fahlun. The Dutchman's game to take it on—Collins says it's death. If they were of the same kidney as some of our boys, I reckon we should see a bit of gun-play. As it is, I guess it'll peter out in talk."

"Guess it always peters out in talk when it's Britishers."

"Same here."

"Well—an' what's Lloyd-George done anyhow? Blew up Buckingham Palace or the Houses of Parliament?"

"Not much. Guess he knows who spreads his hash. No—it's all over this darned load-line question. We've had the whip hand of 'em ever since the Plimsoll barney; now they've killed Plimsoll—jammed him in his patch,

and we're in for some tall business in the way of loading."

"Bet there's gwine to be fun then?"

"Bet your bottom dollar there, siree!"

"Off the Horn, I reckon?"

"If they get that fur."

"Guess yew're a pessimist, Caleb."

"Guess I'm jest using my ol'-factory senses—*no mas*."

Some one laughed feebly. There was a movement on one of the long chairs, then again silence.

San Francisco lay in a shimmering heat-wave, and at the edge of the town, fronting the bay, was Caleb Jefferson's Store—a ship chandlery and rendezvous for captains tired alike of the ships and shops.

White houses, wooden shanties, sand-strewn roads, and a day of stabbing sunshine,—that was the outlook beside them. Across the way a vista of the bay and clustered shipping. Behind, the town holding charred fingers to the blue dome—a town praying for the sea-breeze which had not come.

A spacious verandah lay white and scrubbed in the eye of the sun-glare. Behind it, and opening wide upon its length, was a green-tinted room, draped with bead curtains and decorated with lanterns, grotesques from Japan and the islands—a place matted decently for men's feet should they desire to visit the bar. Behind again was the Store—a building hung with clustered shackles, hanks, blocks, and balls of spun-yarn; stacked with casks, canvas, flags, bags of coffee, sugar, and chests of tea; a place roofed high, and dangling trophies in the shape of fire-buckets, coils of rope, and bundles of oakum; a place having a species of counter where no one stood, and smelling of tar and coffee and tea and canvas,—a mixed blend, gorgeous to the nostrils.

Perhaps a dozen men lounged in the long deck and Burmese chairs grouped upon the verandah—men silent, contemplative, and clad incongruously in tweeds and broad-brimmed hats. One or two were coatless, but all were bronzed, and almost without exception their

legs were stretched V-wise on rests—as though hung out to dry. They smoked big-ended cheroots and fingered affectionately the glass containing a peg which stood in the arm-hole of each chair. About and among them moved a Chinese boy filling glasses and handing cigars. His eyes wore the placid expression of a ruminant cow, but his tally of drinks was a thing at which men marvelled.

Conversation had died. Everything sayable concerning this Bill apparently had been said. Some of the men dozed, despite the cheroot stuck there between clenched teeth; others eyed the sun-glare streaming in bars across the verandah, and speculated on the sprightliness of the flies which danced buzzing in it.

A tall man, clad in white, entered and took a chair removed from the rest. A word of recognition passed, a glance between those who had recently spoken; then some one drank loudly and set down his glass with a sigh. Without was silence—the silence of distant shipping, of a glassy bay, of white-tiered ferry-boats creeping over water flat and gleaming as a mirror.

And across the silence there stole a movement,—an earth-tremor which passed rumbling seaward and left two glasses jingling on the counter. The Chinaman moved over and silenced the pair—“*tu ne ah ma!*” he growled, staring at the bay. “Again no wind come.”

One of the men lounging on the verandah glanced at his neighbour and removed his cigar.

“The old gentleman’s at it again,” he asserted. “Stoking up. As though he hadn’t done enough already.”

His friend took up the burden.

“When I was down in Iqueque, last voyage, we got as much as that two or three times a-day. Stoking up, eh? Guess there’s mighty little to stoke in ‘Frisco now, bar cinders, cap’n.”

“Gol-dolled mo-notonous, I call it,” added a third. He closed his eyes and gave vent to a sigh which sounded like a groan. The men returned to silence, to contemplation, and the smoke of their cigars ascended steadily.

Presently the man dressed in white turned on his elbow, and removing his cheroot, said—

"No. We have not commenced yet. I am waiting orders."

It appeared from this that again some one had spoken.

"Home?" questioned the man who had drawn the remark, a lean personage, coatless, and smoking a long cigar.

"No—Agents."

"I guess that's bad, cap'n," said the coatless one with the nasal drawl of a down-easter.

The man in white, Captain Collins of the *Padrone*, replaced his cheroot and puffed in silence.

"Seems tew me, cap'n," the coatless one resumed, "that a Britisher ain't cap'n of his own ship in these days. Seems like as though your Government meant asphix-iation for the hull fra-ternity. Seems tew me as if they guessed that presently they'd run ships on the end of a wire, or by mag-net."

Captain Collins raised his glass and drank to the end. Then lying negligently spread out, he said, "I was thinking of taking a trip to Alameda this afternoon; can you give me any idea how the boats run?"

The coatless personage accepted the remark without comment. He leaned back nonchalant—a small, yellow face with a goatee beard and perhaps six feet of height entirely at the command of the man in white. "Say!" he cried out.

The Chinaman approached.

"Give Sir Henry the ferry tables."

Captain Collins half turned on his elbow. For a moment he seemed on the point of speech—then he relapsed and continued to puff at his cheroot.

From the far end of the verandah there arose the sound of a voice, indistinct, evidently suppressed. It droned interminably. Words appeared, hung out amidst the jumble for men to seek the context; a sentence here, a note of astonishment, admiration. Then the

boy arrived, handed the tables, and the coatless one, pointing to the empty tumbler perched there in the eyes of all beholders, said—

"Boy! Sir Henry's glass. What will you take, Sir Henry?"

Captain Collins leaned back in his chair, his lips in line.

The boy approached and lifted the glass. The movement appeared to arouse the man. He glanced up, and the boy, with more tact, said, "Whiskey-an'-soda, Cap'n Collin',—allee samee before?"

And Captain Collins vouchsafed a reply—

"Thanks, Ah Sing. No. I am off now—just off."

At that moment there appeared at the end of the pathway leading to the verandah a tall, stoutly built, thick-necked man, wearing a black morning-coat and waistcoat, striped trousers, and a brown bowler hat. He carried a green-lined umbrella, and puffed, sweating, up the steps.

It may have been that Captain Collins had no desire to meet this personage; on the other hand, it may have been simple coincidence—but at once he rose from his chair, and the coatless man rose also.

"Sir Henry——" he commenced, and instantly Captain Collins had him in hand.

"You are speaking to me, Jefferson. Why do you give me a title?"

The coatless one, who, it appeared, was the proprietor of this chandlery, replied quickly, walking a few paces with his trim white customer. "No offence, Sir Henry—no offence. Guess I saw it in the 'Call.' I kal'kilated tew be first to con-gratulate yew. Why not? Seems tew me most men would . . ."

"Never mind that."

"Right, siree."

"Understand, I object. And," with a bitter inflection, "my nation objects also."

"I tumble," said Caleb.

The man in white extended his hand.

"Good-day," he said. And as he spoke he turned

about and moved down the steps precisely at the moment chosen by the newcomer to mount. They met midway, and both paused.

"That you, Fahlun?" said Collins lightly. "All well?"

"Vell?" said the Dutchman, glaring, red of face, "mein Gott, ja . . . vy not?"

He mopped at his forehead with a big bandana handkerchief, the sun lighting him.

Collins glanced him over,—a swift examination which Fahlun resented without intelligence. "Vell," he threw out blusteringly, "vot is it?"

"You have come to some decision, I suppose?" Collins ventured.

"The Agents haff tell me . . ."

"The Agents be damned . . . I beg your pardon . . . but what do you intend to do?"

"I indend," said the Dutchman, his face red and sweat-marked,— "I indend, in this matter, ass in all others, to baddle my own gance—hein?"

"And from what I know of your methods, sir," Collins threw out swiftly, "I think there is no doubt you will reach goal—in time."

He passed down the steps before Fahlun realised he was going, and the Dutchman turned to the occupants of the verandah.

"Vot's that, hey—goal—vot iss goal—hey? I ask you . . ."

"Calaboose, old son—take a drink."

"Calaboose, hey!"

He swung round and stood watching the trim white figure as it passed down the pathway. "Hah!" he said slowly, "you haff the laugh this dime—vait a bit . . . vait and you vill see—soh!"

He came heavily up the steps, and entered the verandah still mopping at a brow which apparently retained moisture in spite of the application.

"Poy!" he cried out, staring at the loungers.

The Chinaman drew near, carrying a tray.

"Pring to me a visky-and-soda—long trink—soh?"

The Chinaman had prepared it unordered. He stood there smiling, his eyes screwed into two thin slits, the embodiment of knowledge.

Captain Fahlun smiled too. He took the glass, dipped his moustache in the beverage, and drank loudly.

"Goodt!" he said again. "Hah, mein friendt—how you vass, how you vass?"

Caleb Jefferson shook him by the hand, viewing him with large sagacity.

"How I vass, eh? Wal—I like that, cap'n. I do so. . . . Had a row with Sir Henry?"

"Vith who?"

"Captain, Sir Henry Collins—commander of the *Padrone*."

"Vy you call him Sir Henry?"

"Because they've given him a title—away there in Eu-ropo."

"Soh—vot for?"

Caleb Jefferson blew a cloud of smoke.

"Seems he did a bit of life-saving under wild conditions," he replied verbatim. "Seems he picked up a hull ship's crew, passengers and all, just outside the Eng-lish Channel. Seems some Danish steamer had opened a seacock or got on the rocks and bin hurt some. Seems she was on the pint of settling her people's hash when Cap'n Collins come along an' picked them off. Seems that Cap'n Collins was almighty near losing his own ship over the trans-action, yet he glued on to his job and drew the people out of that fersaken steamer same as you or me, cap'n, draws corks."

"And so they made of him a knight?" Fahlun questioned, standing quite still, a huge man in black clothes, outlined by the sunlit sky—a man staring wide-eyed at the loquacious down-easter.

"That's so."

"Who did?"

"Eu-ropo's King—one of 'em anyway. He happened to spot an account of this-yere business while he's taking his mat-itudinal coffee, and reading the news. And, says he, 'Gott-for-dam, Mynheer Von Dunks!'

or whatever was the name of his fersaken chamberlain, 'do we happen to have any spare orders kicking about?'

"And the chamberlain kow-towing across the saloon said in a small voice—'We have, my Lord, O King.' Then the King says—'Right! Fetch me a courier and bring me that order right here.'

"So they found a courier and trundled him over to see the King of England. And they ran Cap'n Collins up from his ship, and ferried him over to Denmark. And the King fetched him into the audience-chamber where the hull court was in attendance, and drew his sword and touched him on the shoulder, saying—'Arise Sir Henry Collins, Knight of our Order of St Voltigern. Arise, my son, and have a feed.'

"Then they took him slick across to the banqueting chamber and drank his health, and sent him back to the Britishers. Seems the British Government looked sideways at his order. Seems as if his owners kind o' guessed it weren't al-together the kerect thing as they should be running a skipper knight, and them just plain citizens. Seems they palavered the Marine authorities. Talked to them. Talked to Sir Henry Collins.

"Anyway, along come the Marine boss—some sort of dunder-headed gossoon without a title, and he put the kibosh on it. Jumped on it square in the middle. Guessed there'd be trouble if he sanctioned a simple skipper carrying a knighthood. Opposed the hull biz—officially, yew'll understand. And so, I guess, Cap'n Collins had to climb down, throw up his order, an' take that durned watch or frying-pan me-dal as the Marine authorities ladle out, accordin' tew law. That's how I figure it—annyway."

The men lounging and smoking on the verandah took the thing philosophically. One said, in a drawl which advertised his nationality—

"Guess Collins didn't pull the right strings. Boy! Fetch the boss a peg an' chalk it down tew me."

"The job is to find the strings," said Fahlun with a puzzled frown.

"The job, my friend," said his neighbour, "is to pull 'em when you've found 'em."

It appeared from the twangy speech of these skippers that they were all down-easters; but this was not so. The intonation, the phrasing, and the Americanisms were adapted on precisely the same principle as that which bids an Englishman speak pidgin English in the east.

"When I first went into Manilla," said a voice from a distant chair, "I forgot to put ten dollars on top of my chronometer case. Never heard it was re-quisioned. A bit green, I guess. Waal—I had trouble with the Customs—fellows with gold lace to the shoulder knot, swords, and all the rest. Manifesto all wrong. No summary of crew's effects. Some brooms in the cabin not entered up. A pig killed that showed on the Manifesto—'es' todo falso, capitan,' they decided, 'todo!'

"I kal'kilate," the man went on, puffing comfortably at his cheroot, "that fersaken ten-dollar bill cost my owners fif-teen-hundred dollars, and kept the ship in quarantine till I was fit to pro-pitiate every darned sword-belt that came alongside."

"Ashore or afloat," said a neighbour, "yew can't dew without paam oil. Paam oil is what Collins o-mitted."

This seemed to strike home. The captains reclining there with outstretched legs, looked into the sun-glare and remained in silence until the Chinaman brought the boss his peg. Then Caleb rose and, holding his glass high, said—

"Waal—here's tew Sir Henry, cap'ns, an' tew hell with the Board of Trade!"

This, too, seemed to strike home. The men clinked glasses, drank and resumed their watchful attitude. It appeared at that moment that they lived only to give expression to the enmity announced in the toast.

But Fahlun did not drink. He moved heavily from his chair and tilted the dram upon the sandy path. A word accompanied the action, and the man's lips shaped it—*schwein!*

CHAPTER II.

COLLINS BURNS HIS BOATS.

I.

Now several things had happened since that night in the tropics when Nita intervened on Philip's behalf and the mate received his snubbing. Some have nothing to do with this chronicle; out of others the book itself is built.

The most notable incident lies in the fact that the *Magician* reached home safely after adventures in Channel, which may be regarded as heroic or commonplace according to one's creed and party.

Whether it is wise to attempt the heroic in these days, or whether it is better simply to act the unheroic, is a point upon which, apparently, there is a division. Mankind is full of questionings, charged with missions, uncertain of the honesty of Endeavour, inclined to criticism; and Authority, standing warily in the background, shuffles the cards to please the players.

Some shipowners are doubtful whether it is wise for their skippers to use their eyes too busily. Salvage and life-saving operations entail risks which are not always covered by insurance—and a Government with its fingers on the pulse of the nation is not prepared to increase its expenditure in the direction indicated. In point of fact, as Filcher decided in the privacy of the senior partner's room, "there is no money in it." And, as that gentleman threw out as addenda, "there is always the possibility that you and I may have to put our hands in our pockets to square things up."

Thus it will appear that the action described by Caleb Jefferson as heroic, and recognised in that light by the King of Denmark, had critics who were scarcely as well satisfied. So it fell out that Captain Collins received praise and a snubbing in about equal proportion. Those

who stood to lose nothing by such "harebrained episodes" shouted their approval, and those who might have lost something had a word of advice to offer. The owners especially objected to Captain Collins's new dignity.

Charles Filcher, the acting partner in the firm of Baker, Filcher, Thug, & Co., had been the prime mover in this matter. His objection had taken shape in the phrase, "It seems scarcely the thing that I, the owner, should be compelled to address my servant as Sir Henry—yet that is what it comes to if this holds good."

The partners considered it unwise also. They decided, outside the portals of the Board room, that it must be withdrawn, and they addressed their wits to its withdrawal. A result was reached, therefore, very similar in effect to that described by Caleb Jefferson to the loungers on his verandah.

Filcher forgot when discussing this aspect of the affair that men are great only by the greatness of their actions, and that a master is honoured by the dignity of his servants. He forgot, too, what many of our pettifogging shipowners forget, that Captain Collins was a rather considerable shareholder in the company honoured by Filcher's directorship, and therefore scarcely a servant in the sense used. But perhaps it was knowledge of this fact which produced the change.

And here again, greed, or whatever term one chooses to apply to certain business methods, creeps in. There is no gainsaying the fact that Collins, as a shareholder in the company in which he commanded, was the prime cause of Collins being snubbed by his owners. They had his money. They could get no more. It is indisputable, in many instances, that when a captain invests to obtain his command, he finds the initial lever for his discharge. That, too, is the reason why those persons who have the wherewithal to invest in shipping become shipowners and throw commands to the dogs.

The second notable incident lies in the fact that Philip, now in the last year of his apprenticeship, was appointed to the dignity of fourth mate of the

Magician, a position which carried with it no corresponding advance in pay; and that Captain Collins was translated to a new ship—the *Padrone*.

The Dock people had no manner of doubt as to why he was translated. They said that skippers and all big-wigs only got translation when they made themselves obnoxious. They asserted that Collins was bound to be obnoxious, now the papers had written him up, and they decided point-blank that there are as many brands of shipowners as there are of cigars; also, that some of them were as villainously flavoured. Filcher, they decided, could be tasted a mile off. It was a little godsend for Filcher that Collins should have got himself mixed up in the papers, for any one with half an eye could see that Filcher was itching to take on another skipper who could invest.

They said, without circumlocution, that when one of the Filcher brand desires to find reason for a skipper's discharge, he appoints him to a new command—the command, for preference, of a new ship. Then he sits down to watch. Something will happen. All the world knows that—especially if the ship be jerry built, or what perhaps sounds better, has been decorously scamped by her builders.

Baker, Filcher, Thug, & Co. of Dingle Lane, Liverpool, esquires and directors of several one-ship companies, knew a vessel when they saw one; so said the Dock people. Therefore they promoted Captain Collins to the *Padrone*, a four-masted creation of the warehouse brand, which was to carry black diamonds to China, or kickshaws from the States, and incidentally fill the pockets of the shareholders in Messieurs The *Padrone*, Limited, of which Baker, Filcher, Thug, & Co. were the managing owners.

And to give point to Captain Collins's elevation, the firm gave command of the *Magician*, the box wherein was sunk all Collins's capital, to a "Dutchman," Fahlun by name, with injunctions to make things hum. And when this came to the ears of the Dock folk, they moved off smiling. The crimson audacity of

"Mister bloomin' Filcher" was past belief. They acknowledged the fact with words which rolled in blood.

So the *Padrone* moved out upon the Mersey and started on her maiden frolic towards San Francisco, carrying in her hold a Liverpool freight which battered the juice out of her seams in passing. She sailed without Cave, or Philip, or Freddy; but Mrs Collins and Nita were allowed to share in the tragedy. One can call it nothing less. Life in a tank of these days is usually tragic—but if you "decorously scamp" the tank when you build her, the tank gets up and tells you where, just when you are busy getting her round the corner. And when that corner happens to be Cape Horn you may call it what other thing you will—but it is tragic.

Still, the *Padrone* reached San Francisco. There is no gainsaying that fact, for she disgorged that Liverpool cargo at an up-country port and tripped it back to Oakland to "fill up for England, home, and beauty." That is how the men phrased it as they marched round the capstan winding her bodily against the gaunt warehouse already resting there—or, to speak by the book, the *Magician*.

The *Magician* had made things hum. Fahlun, the new skipper, had seen to that. She had arrived within a few hours of her rival, and the rival had sailed nearly a month in advance. From this it will be seen that Captain Fahlun had taken his owners at their word. To lower Captain Collins's record had been the sum and substance of this man's instructions. He had accomplished it—but not without tragedy.

The tragedy had involved the crew in the *Magician's* case, even the Dock people could have forewarned one on this head; "she was always game to do a bit of washing, was Charley Filcher's bathing-machine—if so be you drove her." And Fahlun apparently had driven.

Philip now served as third mate. He had come by this new dignity through the antics of the *Magician*. It appears that Billy Sant, also an apprentice serving

without an increase of pay, had managed to get in the way of a Cape Horn greybeard when it was in the act of washing the decks. Billy Sant should have known better, probably he did, but Fahlun was standing on the poop out of the wet, and comfortably shouting his views of the pedigree of his third mate, and Billy Sant got flurried. Then the greybeard appeared and swept him with three others into the background of life. He languished now with a perforated lung, the only survivor of a charge which had moved three at a blow from the *Magician's* muster.

Authority in the guise of his Britannic Majesty's Consul at San Francisco had come to his rescue. Doubtless he and those other workers among sailors, the Missions, kept him from starvation and found him in medical comforts. But Fahlun had no hand in the game. He had taken Billy's measure and philanthropically given him his discharge, when a man other than Billy would have refused it. Well—as third mate the man would be useless. And Fahlun was engaged in making things hum; earning dividends out of cheap freights for his shareholders. Cheap freights demand cheap crews. *Que voulez-vous?*

Out of this tragedy Philip received his promotion and learned hourly to rely more on Collins, that grey, stern figure, now in command of the adjoining tank. Learned to acknowledge, too, that the *Magician* chained him by virtue of the presence of Miss Nita. That it was impossible to break the fetters riveted first on the night following that episode in the doldrums. That he had no desire to break them. That his one aim was to re-rivet them, and that Mrs Collins was his friend and his helper.

Besides, had he not lately added to his dignity by drawing from the bottom of his chest the *Conway* jacket which first gave him rank in the Mersey; and had not Nita praised the bonnie sailor rig?

Again—*Que voulez-vous?*

II.

While the *Magician* was busy breaking up her crew, the *Padrone* under more dexterous handling only succeeded in breaking herself.

It seems that she had no idea when she flounced into the water, bedecked with flags and gay with a sousing of champagne, that she would be expected to meet things called Cape Horn greybeards, or that they were forces which could maul.

It came upon her quite suddenly, in the guise of a sou'-west gale, just as she emerged from a scoot through the Straits of Le Maire. It was summer time, and the penguins on Staten Island, away on the quarter, looked like a regiment standing to arms to watch her departure. One hundred miles would put her off the Horn, a further sixty or so would see Diego Ramirez's islands abeam. The *Padrone* dipped her nose in the spindrift. With this wind she could do it by daybreak, hands down. She seemed to take credit for the sentiment thrown out by one of the men. "Carryin' the mails, my son. That's wot we're doin'—carryin' the mails." He smote the rail in evident pride, and glanced at the smoking wake—a bee-line back there towards Staten Island, a bee-line the smooth sea did nothing to efface.

But night was coming on, and a hard bank of clouds hung doggedly in the south, despite the northerly wind.

The *Padrone* marched boldly to meet it. She crept past a dim headland of Tierra del Fuego, opened the land, and met a southerly shift in the arms of a snow squall. The thing whizzed down upon her, and in an hour she was driving at the greybeards, sampling their weight, and doing her best to take it smiling. But they hammered, they maimed, and her thin plates threatened disruption till Collins had taken in sail and was ready to nurse her.

For a month she slammed at the rollers, opening her butts and jobbling her rivets, and at the end of it

stole shamedly north, and got into harbour in the wake of her rival.

It is not every ship that can suffer a hammering at the hands of the Horn when Liverpool has turned her adrift with one of its cargoes. Iron and machinery, cement and the devil—that is a Liverpool freight.

A Liverpool cargo and a ship which has been decorously scamped by her builders is a blend of things which border on lunacy. Of the mad we use soft speech. That is the reason, when "something has happened," men speak with restraint and label it "missing." The word is unsuitable. It is hyperbole. The ship has foundered—probably she has swallowed her crew.

But the *Padrone* was born to lord it yet further in the starry solitudes of the great ocean she faced. Her crew were men of metal more durable than her plates, so they jettisoned cargo, and dry-nursed her to 'Frisco. Then, as the thing obviously stood in need of some explanation, Collins purposed to call a survey. His ship was strained. She had lost freight. Fahlun had beaten him a month, and the shareholders at home, under the presidency of Filcher, were clamorous to know why! Collins refused to be drawn from the track. He cared nothing. He demanded a survey, and in the midst of the argument the cable brought instructions, ordering both ships to take advantage of the new measurement law. Even a shipowner of the humanitarian brand is compelled to do something when shareholders mouth sentiments demanding their dividends.

The agents at San Francisco coldly presented the "flimsy" for examination. It called for no comment on the moment, and Collins went back to his ship to get in close touch with the jumble. The order he had received entailed an additional six inches immersion for that shivering *Padrone*, and already she had buckled her plates!

It was a position apparently designed to try of what stuff this man was made, and, judged from the point

of view emphasised by owners of the type here drawn, the servant did not display that wholesome attitude of docility which Baker, Filcher, Thug, & Co. desired. The Dutchman, with his eye on the humming process upon which he was engaged, made no bones about it. He would have accepted the order if it had involved an additional foot of immersion, instead of the paltry six inches desired. What would you have? It is a hungry world. Man must live—especially "Dutchmen."

And in face of this Collins demanded survey. Declined to add to the risks by taking an additional pound of cargo. Declined, absolutely.

What word is there applicable to such conduct? Asinine? Well, that at all events bespeaks the rudimentary intelligence. There is nothing subtle about it. Nor was there anything subtle about Collins. He appealed to Cæsar, and had Cæsar's agents upon him in a trice.

• • • • •
Night had fallen. A quiet Californian night of starlit beauty. The sea breeze which had come in late still languished to cool the heated land. The lights across the bay outlining what remained of the fairy city burned steadily as the stars pricking the dome over Oakland's wharves—and here, gigantic in bulk, the one sunk low, the other towering above her, were the two ships sent by British owners to gather grain. The *Magician* lying at the loading berth still swallowed grain sacks, shuddering, and with her maw crammed; the *Padrone*, leaning high-shouldered beside her, watched, empty as a drum.

On the poop of the *Padrone* walked two men, Captain Collins and the Agent. It is not every day that the principal visits a sailing-ship placed at his orders—but here an exception had been made. Walter Denny had known Collins for years, and he was there to persuade when in effect he might simply have given instructions.

The two men walked slowly up and down the poop on the side farthest from the *Magician*. A great screen

hung between the ships. It seemed that here again an effort had been made to shut off that gross personage, Fahlun, and to keep him from contact with the more refined commander of the *Padrone* and his wife and daughter. The conversation as the two walked gave point to the suggestion.

"You mean to tell me," Collins threw out bitingly, "that Filcher has knowledge of my reasons and is prepared to face the music if anything happens?"

"Pish! nothing will happen."

"Pardon—I am the best judge of that."

Denny halted to examine the ash of his cigar. It seemed to give him satisfaction, for he commenced to smoke again, speaking slowly between the puffs. "Yes, I admit that. A man of your experience—is bound to know—of what he speaks. . . . But——"

"Precisely."

"Don't take me up like that. You know as well as I do that we can't go on supposition. You know quite well that if you refuse to handle this freight the Frenchmen will jump at it. That's what they're here for, French and German, to knock you off your legs. . . . Why if . . . say, try a new tack."

Collins moved on again. They walked slowly as before, enjoying the fragrance of their cigars, and turning the matter in their minds. No—there was no occasion for the explanation deprecated by Denny.

But Collins was in no mood to slur things, to pass them over and leave them to the imagination. He was the man who would have to fight this thing out somewhere, somehow—it mattered not where or how; but it would come, and he desired a plain issue.

"You comprehend my position," he said in his clean incisive speech. "You tell me you have cabled Filcher that we have a habit of sheering our rivets; that on the passage out——"

"The passage out," Denny interrupted, "don't count."

"Why?"

"Because you were loaded with cement and machinery solid enough to sink an ironclad."

"I admit the loading, but I don't admit the necessity to shake rivets or to buckle plates."

"Have your own way," said Denny, "only don't blame me if they cable me to fire you out."

"I claim the right of survey," said Collins sternly.

"Very well—I'm not hindering you."

"You are not assisting me."

Again Denny halted to examine his cigar. The ash was perfect, round, firm, an inch in length. He flicked it over the rail and again began to smoke.

"I never assist a man," he said in that slow manner he assumed when most he was in earnest, "when I know that assistance spells ruin—for the man. It don't seem to be the square thing."

"You mean you have instructions to find some one who will obey orders—is that it?"

"I deprecate——"

"So do I."

They walked in silence. Up and down the short poop, down and up—silent, thinking, smoking—deciding each of them precisely what was at the end of each half spoken truth. A sound of music came up to them. Some one was playing Chopin's "Guns of Metz." Sad, crying out with the pain of endurance, whispering of the cold march of events, the notes ascended to those two who walked, telling them of other lives in the balance, of other hopes, of women down there to whom, if this thing at which man had but hinted came true—there followed inevitably, suffering, sadness; in the note of that prelude—passionate and vibrant with pain.

Collins marched with a double knowledge rending him. If he insisted on "delaying the ship" and calling a survey; if he persisted in making it difficult for owners patiently struggling to earn dividends, then without doubt he might march—as those poor devils at Metz marched—to surrender. And surrender in his case meant pretty much the same—the loss of everything for which man fights.

Besides—it was not proved. Nothing is ever proved at sea until it is too late to find proof. That, too, is an

axiom for the nation's authorities—and a further one steps hard upon its heels, proof found when proof is unfindable is proof only of the lack of proof.

Again Collins paused in his walk, and again the square forehead, straight lips, and determined chin were justified.

"The ship is a barn, a handbox run up cheaply, perhaps fraudulently, by a firm who cares nothing for what happens. Six pounds a ton! It may be an honest price; it may be true that she was built at that price to keep the men going in a slack time, and it may not—but, you know something of these things, I ask you whether you consider it inevitable that rivets should snap and plates buckle under ordinary conditions? Dummy rivets too, what of them?"

"Probably you were pressing her, cap'n, anxious for a smart passage—eh?" Denny smiled deprecatingly.

"Pressing! Good Lord!—why, we had to nurse her as though they had built her of tinfoil. Look at it straight, my friend. Look at it straight."

"Precisely what I desire, Collins—but . . ."

He stood for a moment listening near the skylight, and the guns boomed out a sad note, iterated amidst the wailing harmonies of the middle register. Again he fell into step. "Some one knows how to play down there," he remarked. "Is that Miss Nita?"

"Yes." Collins brushed trivialities aside. "Look at the issue," he insisted; "I put it plainly. You want me to add to my handicap; you want me to take more cargo, in spite of what I have told you?"

"I am looking at it," said Denny. "And I see Fahlun ranging ahead. I didn't expect you to sit down when a 'Dutchman' takes to fighting,—isn't he in the same boat?"

"You stand here in the position of my owners," Collins waived, weighing this subtlety.

"That's so."

"You may bid me pack up my traps and have done with it?"

"Yes—I have that power."

"And you will use it?"

"I most certainly shall—if you corner me."

Collins marched again in silence. He had no proof. Surmise, conjecture, certainly, and in fullest measure; but proof, the thing for which we find witnesses who are circumstantial and explicit in their evidence—men of character if possible, if not then without any character except that of pertinacity under examination. Proof? There was none—could be none—until—— Again here was this "Dutchman" pushing, aiming to whip him. If he allowed himself to be beaten, a "Dutch" skipper would supplant him, of that he had ample and abounding proof.

"I had no idea that you were the sort of man to see snakes," Denny threw out, but not unkindly.

"And my owners are people who like a man who can 'do a bit of running,'" the skipper countered.

"That's business," said Denny.

The piano sighed and became silent under the last touch of that young hand, a hand which already gave such promise. But Captain Collins scarcely noticed it. He was concerned with that flung-out taunt, "a man to see snakes"! Was that so? Had he lost nerve as so many had done? Was he basing the future too much on the past, arguing that probabilities were actualities? He threw out his hands and brought them down across his face—a swift, shutter-like movement. Probabilities? Actualities? Well, it was for him to decide—and now. Denny faced him.

"Seems to me," he remarked slowly, "that my old friend is forgetting the position. To begin with, you wish to call a survey because of a few sheered rivets. Eh? . . . Dummy rivets. Very well—dummy if you prefer the term—and to end with, you refuse to accept the orders cabled here as to how much cargo you shall carry. Do you intend to start in and fight the British nation?"

Collins stood with a dead cigar in his hand. The screen threw its shadow upon him. "To fight the British nation?" he repeated, uncertain,

"That's how I figure it out, anyway."

"How?"

"Good! Now we're talking. Let's clear the ground. See those ships over there?" He stood pointing to a group of white-painted Frenchmen lying together and waiting to come alongside.

Collins admitted that he saw.

"Waal, what are they here for?"

"To cut us out."

"That's so. More, they're here with the backing of their Government to cut you out. If they carry this cargo you're making such a song about, their Government will pay them a bounty which would about equal your freight—and they would get their freight as well. Her bounty," Denny rolled off the figures as though he liked their sound, "will run into about fifteen thousand dollars. And coming out she earned about the same—say thirty thousand dollars for the round trip. That's subsidy, and to encourage her sailor men . . . what do you get?"

"We get our freight."

"Frenchy gets that too."

"I know . . ."

"Well—how's it going on? Can't see where you come in, anyway. It's not sense. What's your Government doing to help you?"

"Apparently ordering us to load deeper," Collins threw out angrily.

"That any good?"

"God knows it isn't——"

"My friend," Denny tapped him on the shoulder, "get home. Get home and come in out of the rain—or darned if some of you won't get wet."

He turned again and pointed at the *Magician*.

"See that ship, your old ship?"

Collins admitted that he was aware of her propinquity.

"And you see this one, the *Padrone*. Waal, is this your nation's answer to bounties?"

Collins had nothing to say. In his heart he knew that the indictment was true, but he could not admit it.

"Beautiful, ain't they? Rather bluff about the bows, and pretty considerable pudding-like aft—tanks, shell-backs call them—tanks that will carry a batty of cargo—grain for your nation."

"There's nothing particularly inspiring about them, nothing to make your poets squirm; they aren't lofty and trim and dainty as were the old-time ships; they're innocent of any attempt at skittishness,—no poles, no gilt work, no scroll or fancy figures on the prow, just lead-coloured tanks with steel rigging and iron ratlines; all hard, dividend-earning iron and steel. That's what I figure them at—iron tanks, bare, my friend, to the point of indecency—that so?"

"So? I'm afraid it is."

"Waal, who put them up?"

"My owners."

Denny blew a cloud of smoke and withdrew his cigar. "Wrong there, Collins. It's your nation that put 'em up. It's your nation that is responsible for their darned sloppiness—the nation that has killed its farmers and turned its country into a park; that has forced its farm hands to em-igrate or get into the cities—a nation that would turn them into hell if it thought it could get grain cheaper by hustling them there. Goin' to fight them?"

Collins marched in silence, a dead cigar between his two fingers. The wind crooning through the taut wire rigging sang an accompaniment to Denny's speech.

"Let us face this thing," he went on, sarcastic, biting in tone. "The British nation wants cheap bread. It's nothing to her how it comes. Gutter-tanks from the Black Sea; gutter-tanks round the Horn. She has killed her farmers. She wants grain, and the Germans have got together a lot of ships to carry it. Germany has subsidised her ships; so has France; so, too, will America. We want your trade. There's no harm in that, says your nation—all we want is cheap bread. Goin' to fight them?"

"It's a losing game for you men of the sea," Denny went on after a pause. "It stands to reason you'll get



whipped. The cheap ships you are building won't help you, I reckon. The cheap crews you are carrying won't help you. Increase of load-line won't help you; but it's the dying kick of your nation and you'd better come in out of the rain—unless, maybe, you decide to start in and fight them."

Collins approached the rail and stood looking into the darkness. The indictment was true. He knew it. A nation which permits competition to produce such tankish effigies of ships will permit and condone any conceivable iniquity. It had imposed, among other burdens, this new load-line—a thing his "Dutch" competitor had accepted—as a further handicap. Well—let it stand. Some day the nation would awake—and then . . .

"When can you come alongside?"

It was Denny who asked the question, Denny who had watched his mood. Collins turned upon him with a precise answer—burning his boats—

"To-morrow—five o'clock."

The Agent blew a cloud of smoke.

"That's business," he said.

"Will you send the tugs?"

"Good."

"No need if it is quiet."

"I'll send them anyhow," the Agent decided.

Collins turned on his heel.

"A shipmaster is not a shipmaster in these days. He is a slave, a worm, a thing to be dangled and driven until he is broken," he threw out over his shoulder.

"And that, my friend," said the Agent, "is hyperbole—a fixing we have no use for in business."

Collins faced him, grey with anger.

"Modern business," he corrected swiftly.

"Waal, yes—guess we've got to run things pretty fine these days, or . . ."

"Precisely. And when you run things fine at sea, my friend, you are playing a game in which men's lives are risked for gold."

The Agent approached the rail. He looked back at

Collins again, and said in that inimitable drawl of his—

“Guess your pre-mises are a bit awry. You risk men’s lives to find your nation cheap bread.”

Collins had nothing to say. He stood there silent under the stars, staring into the depths, and the Agent passed down the gangway puffing at his cigar.

CHAPTER III.

JACK CALLS A HALT.

“Across the way in England, they were crying out for bread ;
Adown the bay, in 'Frisco, a ship was being led ;
The tug's red screws beat the blue wave white,
The ship's hard sails looked soft and light—
As with crew on board, and a crimp as lord,
She moved to succour England.”

The Agent was right, there was rivalry between these two skippers.

The loungers at Caleb Jefferson’s stores were right also—proof may be found in the fact that some two days later, from an office within the 'Frisco hive, there flashed a message under sea admitting it—

“*Penstimon Liverpool Magician Cimmerian.*”

Those were the words, given with staccato touch, and the Liverpool office taking them in transmitted to the papers, for the delectation of those whom it might concern, the commonplace essence of the thing—

“The *Magician* sailed from Oakland, San Francisco, on June the 15th, for Liverpool.”

Of the suggestion that the *Magician* had entered the Cimmerian darkness of the ancients, or the Cimmerian perils of all ships prowling homeward *vid* Cape Horn, nothing was vouchsafed. And when one considers it,

would it be wise? Are not the silences sufficient for most of us in England, without the written word?

Some, however, it did concern; and they wrote to the office asking, in various moods, when, where, and many other things relative to the eternal verities, the *Magician* might be expected at home. And to them in due course there went out the shipowners' reply, granting additional typewritten scraps—

"The *Magician*," they decided, "may be expected during the second or, at the latest, the third week in October. Our agents inform us that Captain Fahlun has had his vessel dry-docked, and we therefore confidently anticipate a speedy passage. Letters should be addressed to the ship c/o our office, and marked 'To await.'"

The speedy passage indicated by the dates, represented as a minimum, four months—one hundred and twenty days; and midway in that period wiseacres acknowledged that the *Magician* would be lording it over the rollers of Cape Horn in the merry month of August. Now that is a time, as all sailors know, which synchronises with the worst of an Antarctic winter.

It appears, therefore, that some hidden meaning may have been intended when the office made use of that code word which advertised the vessel's departure.

Those whom it most deeply concerned read the explanatory letter with varying emotions; for, despite the cynics, there are people in England who follow gropingly the fortunes of those sailors who bring them food and gold; but it may also be said quite safely, that few gave a thought to the matter of August and Cape Horn. Why should they? Was not the *Magician* one of the new sea-carriers? and was she not registered at Lloyd's against all innuendo as the supreme attempt of British engineers to fight steamships, the Germans, and the French?

So she sailed—or, to be precise, the cables said she had sailed when, in effect, she got no farther on her journey than a certain anchorage in the bay and there halted, while judges ashore untied the knots which already had been made to hold her prisoner.

It appears that Captain Fahlun had omitted the obvious duty of all shipmasters, and had taken himself off from the wharf with a sober crew. That was a mistake in tactics. No captain in his senses would put to sea in a warehouse with a sober crew. It is the only certain way of reaching nowhither. For Jack sober is sometimes more prejudiced than Jack drunk.

When a crew recovers consciousness to the dip of the swell, or the whistle of a gale, and crawls railward to find only a dim suggestion of the land it lately footed, it does not always seem worth while to cast about for disputes. Whether a man be shipped honestly and with a full kit-bag is not the intrinsic question then, but rather, how soon may he expect to reach home and get unshipped. That is the matter set before Jack for solution, and, if the crew has been chosen among sheep, he solves it by doing what he may to get the vessel moving.

But a warehouse! Gutter-deep, by virtue of an Act of which the men knew nothing. Scuppers gurgling and the Golden Gate not yet passed! A warehouse lolling at the end of a tow-line, and San Francisco ferry-boats careening hither and thither playing outrageous steam-organs in the face of a sober crew—women waving handkerchiefs, too! Well, it stands out. One thing only could happen in such a situation. The men came aft in a body and refused duty,—refused, in point of fact, to loose the sails or to touch a crimson rope-yarn “until the question of trim has been decided by the beaks.” From all of which it will be seen that the spokesman in any case was British.

So the *Magician* came round sleepily to her anchors, and drowsed away time while the matter was being argued.

Of course there was a modicum of right on the men’s side; but it did not happen to fit four-square with the law’s definition of the thing—a fact “the beaks” in their wisdom regretted. They said that it was obvious that the British Government had neither seen nor anticipated this ship; but they gave the men to understand

that they were there to administer the law as it stood, and not as it probably will stand when sailors no longer exist. Further, they knew of no law which said anything pertinent on the subject of the winter months and Cape Horn. That especially was defined. The disc and those other hieroglyphics ornamenting the *Magician's* side were not, as the crew asserted, under water. The Plimsoll mark had nothing to do with it. The draught was "there or thereabouts," and the men must return to duty or go to prison for six weeks.

The men decided that the State prison was heaven when put into the scales with the *Magician's* forecastle—a place they termed the pit. They said they would see Captain Fahlun, "an' his officers, an' his bloomin' owners, roastin' in the 'ottest corner of a very warm inferno, before they again set foot on his 'flamin' 'ooker,'"—which, being translated, means that the crew elected to go to prison.

For this reason, then, the *Magician* remained like a shadow at her anchorage, and the after-guard lolled over the rail in the waist listening to the 'Frisco steam-organs.

The after-guard smiled. They liked the steam-organs and the petticoats that fluttered in the breeze as the great white ferries swept by.

But Captain Fahlun and Jimmy Webster, the chief mate, sat solemn and restrained over their meals, deciding each of them how the next crew should be shipped and worked; questioning, too, which of them, the *Padrone* or the *Magician*, would first get outside the gate. To Fahlun the whole position was a travesty of justice. He had worked. He had pushed. He had beaten that skipper he had come out to beat, and now it seemed that owing to the men's action the kudos would be wrung from him. Englishmen stank in his nostrils. Collins especially was damnable—and now it appeared possible that he might win!

At that hour the chances were against much rest in a forecastle which men had already christened the pit.

CHAPTER IV.

SLAVES OF THE LAMP.

Two boys leaned over the *Magician's* rail watching the growing twilight and discussing their crewless condition—or, to speak by the book, one of them was a boy, the other Philip, an apprentice in rating, an officer *in esse*, and a boy at heart.

Like all British ships of any pretension to greatness, the *Magician* carried, beneath the break of the poop, a house for that portion of the after-guard which hovers always between the devil and the deep sea, or in other words, between the forecastle and the cabin. This house is usually dark; very often it is known as the place of smells. Frequently it deserves the appellation, but in sober prose it blossoms as the half-deck.

In the half-deck live the “young gentlemen”—at least that was the name given them in the days when ships were ships and a cuddy steward was at the beck and call of those who paid premiums to learn the art of sailorising. But those days have passed. Competition has effaced them, and has taught shipowners the necessity of an economy so far-reaching in its effect that the young gentlemen of the *Magician* and the *Padrone* were persons who paid premiums to be allowed to do such work as the men would not do, and were taught nothing pertinent except the syntax of a crude and highly ornamented speech. Slaves, in point of fact.

As a rule the young gentlemen emphasise their love of the sea by running away from it. Sometimes, as was whispered of these two ships, they are persuaded to run away by harsh treatment and bad food. The fact remains that they run. Perhaps the race has become fastidious. Perhaps we are actively degenerate. Perhaps there is a modicum of truth at the back of certain statements which, among others, were thrown out in explanation of the running proclivities of those mourned

by Messrs Baker, Filcher, Thug, & Co. Who shall say? For is not man a spinner of yarns by instinct, and a searcher after truth only by compulsion?

Philip Devine had no hesitation in putting his finger on the sore.

"If it hadn't been for that beastly cracker-hash," he announced authoritatively, "I don't believe the men would have jibbed."

"And if it hadn't been for that cracker-hash and old Failing's toe-kick, Billy and the rest wouldn't have been washed away," Freddy chimed in, waving a cigarette.

"Our governors don't pay premiums for us to learn how to clean out pig-stys," Philip added. "No wonder we run. I have a mind to do the same, in spite of promotion. I am sick of the whole thing."

"If you go, I go too," Freddy decided, blowing a cloud of smoke.

"This sort of thing didn't go on when Collins was here," Philip raged. "Collins was a gentleman. I believe he bought the extras himself on purpose to feed us up. The steward said so, anyway. It was worth while being at sea then—you remember our dog-watches?"

"And the piano downstairs . . . and—and Nita playing?"

Philip drew himself together with a swift turn. "And Mrs Collins was so jolly kind to all of us—remember that?"

"Remember? Lord! who could forget?"

"I couldn't," Philip decided with a gulp, despite the stripes on his cuffs.

"More could I," echoed his chum.

The two leaned in silence. Philip examined the rail which was undergoing the process of being chipped. He drew out his knife and stabbed off junks of paint and rust. "It's all because we have a 'Dutch' skipper," he announced. "He wants to make his pile."

"Think the owners know?"

"A fat lot they'd care if they did," Philip argued. "'Run her cheap,' that's Failing's orders. What's the

good of me being third mate; do I feed any better than you do—don't I still live in this beastly hole? It's done to save expense, and we get what we signed for, the same as the men, with 'substitutes at the master's option' thrown in. There's too much substitute at the master's option. Cracker-hash seems to be a substitute. It produces pimples. I'm sick of pimples, and have a jolly good mind to cut the . . . "

"What?" Freddy questioned.

"This blazing workhouse."

"When?"

"Good Lord! anywhen . . . anywhen."

Freddy glanced up and discovered Jimmy Webster, the mate, sitting in his chair behind the screen. "Careful, old chap!" he admonished. Then after further scrutiny: "No, it's all right. He's asleep."

"And if he's awake," Philip asserted bitingly, "he wouldn't see us, for he's as jolly well sick of the old lady as we are—only he can't say so. I know that much."

"Let's go," Freddy urged, leaning out to catch a glimpse of the dinghy trailing at the ladder.

"And never come back?"

"Devil the come, Phil, if you'll stay with me."

Philip remained some time pondering this and staring across the bay at that vista of shipping clustered about Oakland. At length he looked up. "Afraid I'm a sticker," he announced, flushing; "you see, there's Nita."

Out there in the distance they faced was San Francisco, the sun-warmed, earthquake-torn city of promise, standing on the hills. In her streets, despite the chaos, were allurements out of all proportion to the thing offered for plucking. The glamour of an immense disaster hung over the place. Stories of bravery and devilry came out to sweep the ships of their crews. Announcements of giant wages stood in all the papers. Miles of streets lay in ruins, and soldiers still watched at night, waiting to shoot on sight those "ghouls" denounced in the American press. It was a picture which called for closer inspection. It appealed with the fas-

cination of things unknown. It appealed dominantly, because there, at work amidst the ruins, were their shipmates, denizens of the half-deck driven to desertion by the methods of this Dutch skipper who had been put in authority over them. But, also, there was Nita.

To remain in the *Magician*, a warehouse deserted by her crew, who denounced her as unseaworthy, and to eat cracker-hash, seemed at that moment to be more appalling than to court the danger of further earthquakes. To continue in this rather one-sided business of sailorising, where all the plums go to the shipowner and all the kicks to the men at sea, appeared absurd to Philip and idiotic to his chum. But Freddy had no Nita to hold him tied. He emphasised his desire.

"I'm for going!" he announced, wagging the stump of his cigarette. "I'm sick of cracker-hash."

"I'm sick too—sick . . ."

"Then why not cut it?"

"Because . . ."

"Mr Devine!"

A voice from the poop, from the man who appeared to sleep. The pair looked up and discovered that the chief had risen, and was yawning and stretching his limbs with the vigour of a caged beast.

Philip acknowledged the summons with flickering pulses.

"Sir?"

"Come up here; . . . you too, Freddy."

The pair climbed the ladder and stood awaiting the deluge.

"What were you talking of?" came the question direct.

"Nothing very important, sir," Philip evaded. "It's rather dull work—that's all."

"I agree. It is dull—confounded dull."

Silence between the trio. The chief engaged in lighting his pipe, watching them. At length he faced them again, a puzzled expression in eyes usually stern and worried.

"What on earth brought you two fellows to sea?" he questioned.

Neither had any very pertinent explanation at hand. They might easily have turned the searchlight upon their interlocutor, but they refrained.

"The same reason, I suppose, that induced Billy and the others to come. Romance, eh?"

Philip acknowledged that it was possible. "But," he added, a trifle more ill at ease than before, "we haven't found it."

"Nor did I," said the chief. "And the others didn't find it either, so they played the fool and ran. Do you know what running away means?"

"No, sir."

"Very well; I'll try to tell you. Sit down. I have no one to talk to, and I don't want to sleep yet, so I will talk to you. Sit down, Devine. You especially ought to know what it means, now that you are one of us—eh?"

They took seats facing their chief, and prepared for the inevitable. It was plain that Jimmy Webster had heard.

"When I was nearly out of my time," the chief went on, "I happened to get into a hot ship. I was third mate that trip for the first time—like you, Devine. We sailed for Sydney, and there my chum ran away. I was only prevented from doing the same by a stroke of luck or ill-luck, God knows which, but the result was that I stayed.

"Next voyage we had a decent skipper, and a mate who knew how to handle men without the 'toe-kick.' Good. We got round to Newcastle, loaded coal, and came here. And here, one night, I came across my chum. I was second then.

"He was what is called a pretty boy on board ship, and he had won the Brocklebank prize on the *Conway*. The sextant figured as largely on his first voyage as did his uniforms. When he reached Sydney he sold his sextant and uniforms. He was sick of the sea. And then he ran away. Now I met him again, and he was a painted, white-faced dandy of the shanties,

"Know what that means, Devine? Not quite? Well, there's no lower thing on earth. There's no meaner billet in 'Frisco or Marseilles for man or boy. There's no surer road to hell in all the world—and my chum was on it. You may guess I didn't rush in to meet him. I knew. I saw—and my chum was a parson's son. Think of it!"

The chief rose from his chair and stood above the two, pointing with his pipe-stem into the dark.

"Work? Yes, of course he had tried work—but that is not easy out here. Then he starved a bit. Then he was taken in hand by a fellow derelict, and they drifted together—rosily, quite comfortably, for the other was a remittance man. Then came drink, and opium, and women. . . .

"I pray," said the chief, a tense note in his voice,—"I pray sometimes for my old chum; but it isn't easy. It isn't easy."

He turned away and paced the decks swiftly up and down, then halted again. "And what do you think sent him to this? A hot ship? Well—but all ships aren't hot, and all skippers aren't cads. Remember Captain Collins. You have sailed with him. So have I. Devine, my friend, I wish we had him here to-day. . . . But what sent this youngster adrift? What generally sends us adrift? What sent your shipmates adrift?

"Bad grub and the 'toe-kick,' eh? Well—but is that enough? We will add cracker-hash and substitutes at the master's option,—but is that sufficient? What do you think, either of you?"

"It shouldn't be sufficient, sir," Philip acknowledged, shame forcing his hand.

"It is *not* sufficient, you mean. Watered marmalade isn't butter, I know. Sand isn't sugar; nor does molasses taste nice in the tea when sugar is played out. Canned horse doesn't take the place of salt horse when the salt horse is a bit putrid. . . . Then there are the pig-stys to clean, the hen-coops to scrape out, the brass-work to polish, and the skipper's dog

to wash. Handicaps all of them, I admit, but are they sufficient to palliate bla'guardism?"

He leaned forward, watching these two with eyes which asked for renunciation, and they gave it.

"No, sir, they are not," Philip decided, his square jaw set; "only mugs run."

"It is bla'guardly to run," the chief remarked. "For running is desertion; and desertion," he added slowly, "is death. Death more certain and abiding in its consequences than the daily death of life on board a modern merchantman."

He approached the rail and knocked the ashes from his pipe. The two waited in silence, wondering still what came. Webster appeared to have forgotten them, he stood so long. Then he returned, searching them with a glance.

"Yes," he decided, "I admit it is dull."

The pair stared.

"Confounded dull. Worse than when we were at sea . . . er, care for a row?"

The sentence was almost abrupt. The lads gasped. Heaven opened for them.

"Oh, if we could, sir! If you would give us leave! If you . . ."

The chief had the air of one who would have given his pay-day for a run; but he faced them with the question—

"For how long?"

"An hour or so, sir," Philip begged, amazed.

"To go where?"

"Over to the *Padrone*, sir."

Mr Webster examined the starry depths and turned towards the chart-room. "Very well," he decided, "you may take the dinghy, but be on board again at ten o'clock."

"Thank you, sir," the pair echoed in unison.

"Mind," said the chief, "I am trusting you."

The two backed down the ladder. The heavens smiled. The bay, asleep there at the foot of the gang-way, was a lake whereon it was possible to skim,

gondola-wise. The dinghy, plucking at her painter, a barge of state sent to waft weary souls to rest.

The pair doffed coats and entered. They sculled rapidly across the bay towards the wharves and jetties of Oakland. Then when breath seemed necessary, Devine looked over his shoulder at Freddy and opened his mouth in judgment.

"He heard every word we said," he decided.

"Think so?" Freddy questioned, leaning on his sculls.

"Sure."

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Freddy.

Philip took up his sculls again. "He's a brick," he asserted; "and I'll see them all to the devil before I run."

"Same here," said Freddy.

They rowed in silence.

And across the water, still lying at Oakland wharf, was the ship which stood for heaven in the eyes of these two. She lay unstirred by the fact of their resolve. She lay there gathering, as the *Magician* had gathered, her quantum of grain for that clamorous nation which will not grow it, yet demands of her sailors that it shall be found—found and placed ready baked upon the breakfast-table, and above all other considerations, that it shall be cheap.

CHAPTER V.

ANITA.

Oakland wharf. Across the bay, 'Frisco, outlined with lamps. 8 P.M., and the bell clanging four double strokes on the poop of the *Padrone*. The sound went echoing along her decks, reverberating amidst the sheds, calling faint echoes against the walls of a distant jetty.

A grey-sided warehouse, the *Padrone*, similar in many ways to that other grey-sided warehouse lounging and stacked out there in the bay. A warehouse lying at the edge of a great seaport with yawning hatchways still open to a descending stream of sacks and grain.

It came down the shoots with the hiss of boiling water, water seething in a caldron. It never ceased. The noise it made accompanied all sound, all movement, all effort.

Above the hatchways the hiss rose in volume until it appeared to ape the hiss of the spume at the foot of great falls. It was the voice of the grain poured from a vast continent upon the bottom boards of a British ship lying there waiting to carry it to that distant island whence the American people had sprung. And over the ship, hanging like a giant shroud, was the dust-cloud which accompanies the grain.

Trains rushed clanging through the night, headlights glaringly prominent, great bells advertising their progress. The sheds trembled as they went past, but still the grain descended, hissing, somnolent. Men standing on the *Padrone's* deck shouted orders, requests to the invisible spirit up there in the cloud, who controlled the rush. The grain rustled down, impassive, monotonously suggestive of sleep. Railway waggons came booming out of the murk and stood there beside the ship with a clash of buffers. The sacks hustled resolutely downward, gravitated towards the pit which would swallow them, giving out the note of water tossed and seething in the rapids.

A dark night, and the *Padrone's* steel yards, pointed to clear the sheds, stood unstirred and rigid amidst the stars. Orion crowned one, Sirius another, the Pleiades dim amidst a tangle of shrouds and braces; the Southern Cross tilted on its side, red amidst the haze overlying the Pacific.

A brilliant night. A night of vast possibilities in any known haven harbouring men and women, breathing and defiantly in love. A perfect night—at least, that is the description dark-eyed Anita Collins gave it from

her place behind the screens, hidden from the yawning hatchways.

Nita they called her in the *Padrone's* cabin. Anita because light had first fallen upon those dark eyes of hers in this Californian roadstead; and now Miss Nita had grown resentful, a trifle restless under the love and guardianship of these two who had given her breath.

Grain ships were a nuisance. The hunger of the British people was a nuisance—that is to say, the fact that Anita was chained to this round of grain-carrying for a people who never audibly said thank you; who never visibly clapped hands on the ship's arrival; who were content, as it appeared, to sit still and see the grain poured into their laps, and troubled nothing of how it got there,—these were the facts which made pretty Anita arch her brows and frown when she considered.

It is not pleasant, even in a land of sunshine and with the drowsy note of the grain in one's ears, to watch movement in a sphere when one's *alter ego* is somewhere hid from sight—and perhaps in danger. It is scarcely profitable, at all events for a pretty girl, to speculate interminably on the passing of ferry-boats crossing even so sunlit a bay as the bay of San Francisco. The white-tiered beauty bound to Alameda becomes a pest, the gem which flashes there to Saucelito or the Golden Gate a bore, when after search through consecutive hours one fails to discover that *alter ego* landing somewhere, lips ready, eyes on fire.

And how, especially on this night, could there be pleasure when it was known that the *Magician* still lounged in the bay? and when youth has gleaned enough to understand that never under any circumstances can the hands be allowed leave when a ship is in the bay?

Oakland wharf! It was a miserable place—a place of penance. The lean fingers of a dozen wharves pointed the girl's indignation. Yerba Bueno? Now! Well, that at all hazards was impossible. The hum of the

elevator, the hiss of the descending grain, the dust-cloud hanging lambent in the glare of great lamps,—all pointed to impossibility.

The small foot peeping there beneath white frills tapped out the syllables, accentuating them—impossible! And yet the monster, it appeared, had promised! Promised in spite of the order written large over all ships at anchor in a roadstead. And in spite of the impossibility, in spite of the hazard his promise implied, Nita's dark eyes had the glow of hope.

Waiting is appalling always and in all ages, but waiting in the spring-time of life is agony wilfully drawn out or maliciously prepared for our annoyance. It is a harrowing fact from which there is no escape, until—well, until the thing happens which happened at this moment out there amidst the hum of the elevator and the hiss of grain falling into those yawning hatchways spread upon the *Padrone's* deck.

Nita was sitting under the awning near the starboard rigging, reclining, as a matter of fact, in her long deck-chair, a book upon her lap, and half asleep. That is what appeared to be the condition of the soft white figure so gracefully at ease on the moonlit deck. Then came a sound—pat-pat-pat—on the awning overhead, and Nita's eyes were open. She moved slightly, glancing up and down. Silence. No one visible—only the tap repeated thrice. It might have been a bird hopping up there on the canvas, but in that case the girl would not have moved so swiftly.

Silence everywhere—silence but for the hum of an elevator, now mercifully dying, and the hiss of grain still falling out there beyond the screens.

The girl crossed over, and taking a small line in her hand, pulled three times. The line was a piece of signal halliard stuff which vanished overhead and over-side. And having pulled it, she let down a rope—a piece of the running gear coiled in the rigging, and made it fast, signalled, and stood waiting.

Then from the depths there arose a pair of hands, followed by the head and shoulders, trunk and legs, of

a man young enough and strong enough to scramble fifteen feet up the *Padrone's* bare side,—the monster, in other words, who by some chance had found means to keep his promise. He reached the chains quite breathless, looked up, received a nod, and climbed on board.

"That's jolly stiff," he remarked, taking the girl's hand.

"And it must be the last time, Philip—you promise me?"

"I have," he decided, kissing cheeks already flushed, and finding heaven in the touch she gave him. "I shall see him to-night. Didn't you expect me?"

"I was wondering," Nita replied, "and it was horrid and lonely with the noise of the grain in my ears and the groan of that awful elevator; . . . and, and it was late—so I was wondering——"

Pause, semicolon—full stop. Face at rest on a shoulder hard by.

"What?" questioned the monster, patting the face.

This was unfair. Any girl confronted with so outspoken a query would admit as much—perhaps not in words. Yet the implication would be there, as was the case in Miss Nita's. "Nothing, Philip."

"Nothing! Why, you said——"

"Does it matter what I said?" came the question swiftly, aimed to avert calamity.

"Of course it doesn't," the monster agreed, holding the soft and dainty whiteness in a clutch which would certainly produce creases.

"Thank you."

But Philip remained unconscious of guilt either in speech or grip, despite the sarcasm latent in the one and the fingers striving to release that arm especially which found peace at her waist. Perhaps he was too much occupied with the set of Miss Nita's mantilla; perhaps it was the colour of her hair that attracted him and rendered him oblivious of the sarcasm regnant in that "Thank you."

At all events, he was not permitted to remain unconscious.

"I think," she decided, relinquishing her effort to obtain freedom,—*"I think you are very rude."*

"Me?"

"Yes, sir—you."

"Why—what have I done?"

"Said," she admonished, shaking a white finger before him.

"Said then," the monster repeated, capturing not only the white finger but the soft white hand and carrying it to his lips. *"What did I say, sweetheart? Tell me."*

And Miss Nita, her eyes on his, unabashed, unalarmed, *"Does it matter what you said?"* tantalising, drawing the monster to the perpetration of still more terrible blunders—if he would.

And he at length, on guard, but holding jealously the white hand he had captured, replied carefully, *"Yes, of course it matters—if . . ."*

"Oh! but it wasn't."

"Then it doesn't?"

"No."

"For I am with you and you are with me—and nothing matters, eh, little sweetheart?"

"No," little sweetheart granted at length. *"No, nothing matters."*

"Now I am here and will see him."

"Now you are here," she repeated, obedient so far to his prompting.

"And I had been thinking of running away," he remarked, staring into the beautiful eyes.

"Running away!—how, from me?"

He laughed, holding her in his arms, kissing the red lips now threatening disaster; he laughed, drawing her close, holding her so that she could not carry out that threat, latent in eyes which certainly flashed.

"No, sweet—not from you. You hold me. You keep me chained. I would have run from the ship but for you. I hate the sea."

She clung to him,—a soft, white figure of purity and tenderness, watching the words he formed, the flash gone.

"I think," she said at length, "it is you who hold me."

And the voice of the grain pouring out there in the still dark night lent point and emphasis to their words. Nothing mattered. The hum said so. The hiss acquiesced. The shroud hanging lambent above all wavered and agreed.

CHAPTER VI.

SIR HENRY COLLINS.

"What with Dutch crews, Dutch clerks, and Dutch skippers," said Captain Collins as he entered the cabin and took a seat on the settee fronting his wife's chair, "we might just as well give the whole thing up. Life isn't worth living. I wouldn't put a dog in charge of a ship in these days—be hanged if I would."

Mrs Collins looked up, and catching a gleam of annoyance in her husband's eye, put down the work she held and questioned—

"What has happened this time, Harry?"

"Happened! Good heavens, what is always happening? Aren't we going down-stream as fast as even our friends the Germans could wish? Aren't they pushing us, giving us the go-by, right and left? Isn't competition sufficiently severe without their help, and aren't we sitting down to it and taking it smiling?"

Collins tossed his felt hat on to the chronometer case and paused to regain breath. He had just returned from a day spent in the 'Frisco hive, mainly with his Agents. Agents are people who breed trouble. They existed, as far as Mrs Collins could discern, for the sole purpose of ruffling a jolly, good set of men,—her husband in particular,—and should be annihilated. Mrs Collins acknowledged these facts without giving

voice to them, then proceeded to answer those flung-out shafts.

"Of course we are going down-hill, dear—aren't we British? And of course we take it smiling—because, well, don't the British always take things smiling?"

"Afraid we do; . . . er, where's Nita?"

"You do, at all events," she decided, rising and crossing to side with him while she calmly ignored his question. "But what has happened? These are old troubles, and quite stale."

"Stale are they!" Collins raged in spite of the tone; in spite, too, of the quiet and thoughtful eyes searching his. "Stale, eh? Yes, by gad! they are. But this thing is not stale—it is just a new twist of the tail, an application of the bow-string our Government always keeps in hand. In plain English, we are to load deeper. There is a new Act. Plimsoll's day is done, and Filcher will be able to make more dollars, while we retain the responsibility."

"And that, too, is nothing very new, dear, is it?"

"No; but fifty years ago a shipmaster had some voice in the matter of loading and provisioning his ship. Now he might just as well be dead. German boy-clerks give the orders. German skippers receive them. German crews carry them out. Fish! there's no room nowadays for Englishmen. Our Government sees to that, or our nation with its insane craze for all things cheap."

"When did you first hear of this,—not to-day?"

"No; it has been in the air, and I have been fighting it. I gave in about the survey; now I can give in about this—or I can pack my traps."

"I knew there was something worrying you. My poor Harry!" She drew close, and put her arms about his neck; but Collins refused to acknowledge the touch. He raged on.

"Talk about sweating! Isn't it sweating to insist on cheap bread when you know the poor devils who bring it are ground more finely than the flour you use, in order that it may be cheap? Sweating!" He

rose in spite of the caressing hand, and moved wrathfully up and down the cabin. "Isn't it sweating to run ships short-handed, manned by idiots instead of sailors, chaps who don't understand a word you say? Isn't it sweating to jam us up with cargo until we haven't the buoyancy of a bundle of fish-plates? Why can't the *Magician* find a crew, do you think? Why have her people gone to prison? Because she's too deep. Because she will roll like a barrel off the Horn, and make mince-meat of her crew. Crew, they call it! Good Lord! Are fourteen men and six boys sufficient to man her, or us?"

"My dear, it's philandering pure and simple. We are playing with the devil. Each year the devil chips in and takes his pound. Sooner or later that will be the upshot with us. Sooner or later you and I and Nita will be face to face with . . ."

He paused, and drew one hand swiftly across his brow,—a quick, decided action; then, arms held out, he moved to his wife's side,—a trim, bronzed man with a voice that rang.

"This shall be our last trip, little woman," he announced. "At all events, you and Nita shall not come any more. It isn't fair game. A ship sails under water these days, not over it. A captain has no say in the question of seaworthiness. She may be a sieve, but she must go. Men can stand that kind of thing, swim if it comes to a pinch, but women; . . . no, it isn't fair game."

Mrs Collins put one hand up and laid it on his brow—a cool, white hand, caressing in its touch. "If it is not fit for us, Harry, it is not fit for you. We will give it up together," she decided. "But what will this new Act do?"

"Sink us six inches deeper than we were coming out."

"And that means . . .?"

"That we shall be too deep—er—and to finish up with, the Agents have countermanded the bulk of my requisition for stores. Filcher's instructions, of course. Where's Nita?"

Mrs Collins refused to be drawn from the track
"And what have you decided?" she questioned.

"Obey orders if you break owners," he quoted.

"But if you will be short . . .?"

"I can pay for the stuff myself, of course," he interjected.

"Why should you?"

"Precisely. Filcher might, with equal relevancy, ask the United States to provision his ship," he admitted.

"If I know you, Harry, I expect you will pay for them all the same."

"Nonsense, little woman—er—where's Nita?"

This time Mrs Collins decided that it was possible to hear the question. The movement of her hand on those bronzed temples had wrought the miracle she perhaps expected. Captain Collins no longer seemed anxious to damn all mankind because of the deeds of a Department which seems destined to drive ships more speedily to the end which faces them always; nor had he any longer a desire to roam the cabin floor as though he were some species of caged beast—as indeed he was.

"Nita," said Mrs Collins, "is on the poop, I fancy."

"Alone?"

"No, dear—she is with Philip."

Captain Collins moved restlessly a moment considering this, then asked, "Do you think it wise—in spite of what I have said?"

"Harry, they love each other," she urged, and again her hand moved across his brow.

"And that should be sufficient condonation for any madness?" he smiled up at her.

"It was sufficient for us, dear," she reminded him.

He rose at once, and marched up and down before her. "I know, I know," he broke out, his voice again thrilling; "I admit it all. But the position of a sailor in these days is not what it was when you and I married. Twenty years have passed, and Philip cannot start where I started. The conditions have changed. I must see him and have a talk.

"No, no," he smiled in answer to her look of appeal,

"I shall not hurt him—or Nita. But I shall be glad if you will get hold of the lass and leave us two together,—eh, little woman?"

They moved, arms linked, to the companion stairs and passed out upon the screened deck calling for their daughter.

A white figure rose swiftly at this and came to meet them. Behind it stalked a taller personage clad in the dark-blue uniform of the Mersey cadet ship, his heart thumping as it had never thumped in all his years of service.

Mrs Collins released her husband's arm, and taking Nita by the waist, threw a swift glance of encouragement at the lad and left him to face his trial.

The two came together at once with a cheery cry from the elder, thrown out to put the youngster at his ease.

"Well, Conway, what are you doing in that uniform here?"

"I came to see you, sir," Philip explained; "but as you were away I—I spoke to Mrs Collins."

"And she gave you carte blanche, eh?"

"No, sir; she said I must see you."

Captain Collins took a cigar from his case, rolled it between finger and thumb at his ear, cut off the end, and offered the case to his companion. "Smoke?" he questioned.

"No, sir—thank you."

"You do smoke, of course?"

"Oh yes—but . . ."

"Just so. Well, smoke now, my boy. Always smoke when you are in difficulties. It helps one to keep cool."

Philip accepted the cigar and lighted it at the match Captain Collins held for him, wondering meanwhile whether the thing would choke him, or whether the words he had to say would cause the commander to lapse from the attitude he enjoined. But he made no headway either with smoke or words—the words especially were difficult. He had rehearsed them till he knew



them by heart—but now, on the quiet deck, walking to and fro with the man he desired to propitiate, the whole thing escaped him. With Mrs Collins it had been otherwise. A woman can read a man's heart; but a man, and pre-eminently one who had been his commander, has no insight, and in all probability would presently kick him off the poop.

"Well," said the stern-faced personage at his side, "I thought you had something to say to me?"

"So I had, sir—but . . ."

"Just so—it's getting late. Smoke all right?"

"Capital, sir, thank you."

As a matter of fact, the cigar had gone out. Even that appeared to have escaped Philip's attention as he walked there ringing the changes on a sentence he desired to form suavely. "I think," he said at length, "I'll not smoke. It seems to make me forget."

"As you like," said the captain. "Cut along. I am listening."

"The fact is, I love your daughter, sir," Philip blurted in desperation.

"I know it," said the captain.

Hope rose high in the lad's heart.

"And I wished—I wish to ask you, sir, if you will consent to . . ."

"Stop a minute."

Philip became mute. Hope died.

The captain blew a cloud and examined the ash of his cigar. "You tell me you love my daughter," he repeated, "and I respond that I also love her. Neither of us, therefore, is likely to wish to injure her—eh?"

"Injure her! Rather not, sir. I should like to see——"

"Precisely. So would I."

The stern-faced man halted beside the rail and touched it. "What is this made of?" he questioned.

Philip stared, then answered baldly, "Iron, sir."

"That house under the skids where the bo'sun lives?" The finger moved to point it out.

"Iron, sir."

"Masts, yards, rigging—what are they?"

"Iron, sir—or steel."

"Your own ship?"

"Iron, sir—all iron."

"Precisely. The iron age."

Philip wondered whither they drifted.

"And when ships are built of iron, my lad," the cold voice reminded him, "you must understand there is no room in them for women. Women require comfort. Is there any comfort in an iron ship?"

"Not much, sir; but then the cabins are——"

"Just now they seem a little paradise to you, but that is only by comparison with the den you live in. Take my word for it, Devine, the cabins of an iron ship are just as scanty and uncomfortable as they were comfortable and homelike in the days when ships were built of wood. I know. I have served in both, and the iron has entered into my soul.

"You are a sailor, and I think you are not a fool despite the fact of your calling; therefore I will put my views on this matter before you, and perhaps we may come to understand each other."

And again he faced him with a biting analysis of the conditions in which they moved.

"What nationality is the man who commands your ship?"

"Dutchman, sir."

"Steward?"

"Mexican."

"Cook?"

"Nigger, sir."

"What were your crew coming out?"

"Dagos and 'Dutchmen,' generally speaking."

"Just so. And why, do you suppose, do we carry so many foreigners in our ships?"

Philip did not know. It had not come before him in this light, and he said so.

"Very well. I will tell you," the other announced, grimly in earnest. "We ship foreigners mainly because

the conditions are such that no decent Britisher will accept them, and because the foreigners are cheaper.

"Steel ships, my lad, are the result of competition. They are lighter, and therefore carry more cargo; they are cheaper to build, therefore we build them; but they are more fragile, therefore they break up more quickly and drown their crews more speedily. You are a sailor. I suppose you dream of being in command, and you ask me, who know just what is your chance of command, to give you my daughter whom you love.

"Well, if I didn't love her also, I should say, take her, my boy, and be good to her. But as I do, I say to you now, here, in no circumstances will I consent to my daughter marrying a sailor. Sailorising is done. Captains are no longer captains. Ships are run from an office to pay, and we are paid a 'Dutchman's' wage to do what the Dutchmen will jump to do if we refuse."

He paused a moment, examining the lad's face, then continued earnestly. "I want you to understand these things. I like you. I think you have grit—let that suffice. Now listen to me. Do you imagine, for instance, that I can control the loading of this ship? Do you fancy that either I or Captain Fahlun have a word in the matter of seaworthiness, stowage, provisioning, charters—anything? You are an officer now, you should know these things."

Philip made no reply. The questions travelled beyond his range. His training in the Mersey cadet ship had taught him that a captain was omnipotent. The years he had been at sea had confirmed this view. It is the half-deck's point of view always, and he said so in words which made Collins turn away to hide his laughter.

"Precisely," he said at length. "Well, I will teach you my position, or for that matter the position of any skipper in these days. If I exercised my prerogative and refused to take more cargo round the Horn than I considered safe, or chose to run up bills for food or stores, I might just as well resign when

I reach home as wait to be told to do so. I am not master. A shipmaster is not master in these days. He may not use his judgment. He must obey orders, and some of the orders are damnable.

"Therefore, my boy, I don't want you to continue until it is too late. I just want you to give up the sea and look out for a shore billet. Never mind what. And if you can come to me then and tell me what you wanted to tell me just now, I will listen."

Philip paused in his walk and stood looking wistfully into the night. Anita seemed more remote than ever—life without her a blank too deep for words. Captain Collins halted too, and, drawing near, placed one hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Do you still love it?" he questioned, "and in spite of the *Magician*?"

Philip turned swiftly to him. "No, sir; I hate it. It isn't what I expected when I was on the *Conway*. Why," he blurted in desperation, "before I came to see you, sir, I had half a mind to run away."

"And leave Nita?"

"I was miserable . . . and I had forgotten. There had been a row, and——"

"Precisely. Well, don't do that—here. Wait till you get home. People who run away from ships generally rot. I don't want you to rot, Philip—nor does Mrs Collins, or Nita."

"It's a piggish life, sir. I hate it," he reiterated, fumbling with disappointment and the blank which faced him.

"Good. It is. But wait till you get home. You are out of your time and can do as you wish. Take my advice and go into your father's office. Underwriting ships pays better than commanding them."

He paused. Philip maintained his attitude of dejection, leaning against the rail. Captain Collins turned away and marched the poop a while in silence. He had it in mind to make use of even plainer speech. He liked the boy, as he called him, and had

a very strong faith in love; but he recognised that it is not wise for a commander to put himself in the power of a subordinate, even when the subordinate happens to be in love with his daughter. So he walked the poop examining the matter and smoking like a chimney. At length he halted again beside the rail and touched Philip's shoulder.

"Listen," he said. "I am going to trust you. I think I can, eh?"

The boy looked his thanks, but words were not easy at that moment.

"We are a new ship. We made rather a hash of it coming out—too much dead weight; she jerked some rivets out of her, and we might never have reached anywhere. Luckily we were able to get at them, and kept her free with the pumps for the rest—but it tells me a thing or two, and I have reported it to Filcher. I wanted to hold a survey, but my hand was blocked at every turn. They stick in the rivets too hot, machine work of course, and the damned things snap off with the work of the ship,—sometimes they are dummies,—you understand?"

"Well, that is the reason we are not loaded and ready for sea as quickly as the *Magician*. On top of it all my owners cabled ordering us to take advantage of this new Act they have passed—an Act which permits us to load deeper by six inches or so than when we left England. That is the last straw, my lad. It bars any future sailorising for me. I am not master. Fahlun, on the other hand, has chosen to obey orders—of course that handicaps me. He is too deep, and his crew have refused duty. I shall obey orders too, and . . . and we shall be too deep. Too deep, you understand, for the Horn in winter time."

He moved up and down the deck athwartships, growling out his indictment in a voice which reached no farther than the lad. He glanced now and again over his shoulder as though searching the deck for possible eavesdroppers, and Philip, noting the new

attitude, the suddenly brusque speech, and the air of held-in anger, came back from his dream and faced him with the attention he desired.

"Now, you see, I can do nothing in a case of this sort, my boy—I who am in command. I know the danger, but I must not take precautions. I sail the ship. I have nothing to do with the question of seaworthiness. No skipper has,—you understand that?"

"I am beginning to understand, sir," the boy returned.

"Good. Now there is more behind this, but I need not go into details. I have told you enough, considering you are the son of one of our underwriters."

Again Philip intervened to ask whether his father's firm had anything to do with Filcher's ships; and again came the answer, irascibly pointing the *dénouement* in certain unspecified contingencies,—“Your father certainly underwrites our firm. Probably he is interested in both of us—what do you think yourself?”

"I don't know, sir. I took no notice of that kind of thing when I was at home."

"Would you like to warn him?"

"If you think it necessary."

"I do. More—I wish you to cable him, and I will give you the code message. Tell him to get out. You understand what that means?"

Philip acknowledged that he knew.

"Good," said the captain, and again he marched the poop, considering. Half a dozen turns up and down, down and up. Philip thought he would never stop; but presently he paused, and continued even more jerkily than before—

"Mind, I am trusting you—because you love my little girl. Note that."

Philip acknowledged the confidence in tones which carried conviction.

"Right. Now I have a presentiment—don't know that I ever had one before, but my dear mother believed in them, and proved them. I suppose that is

the reason I believe. At all events, I wish you to cable your father to warn him." He came nearer, speaking in low, dramatic sentences, as though he would picture the facts by sheer emphasis. "Understand, my boy, what faces us. We are going round the Horn in a thing that shakes out her fastenings. She's iron. You can't plug iron. We are going round the Horn too deep. It will be August. We're undermanned, both of us, and August is the worst month. Savvy?"

"I do, sir."

"Of course," said Captain Collins, "you understand that one has no fear, eh?"

"Sir, I remember that you took all those poor devils off the *Jungfrau* in Channel," he returned with enthusiasm.

The picture conjured by the question was absurd. The notion of this tall, grey, strong man having fear had no place in the boy's imagination. Fear! He would with equal promptitude have questioned his own hardihood.

"And I know that you are not afraid," Captain Collins added, "because,"—as though the thing required proof,—"because no Britisher is ever afraid of peril, eh?"

"As though he could be, sir!"

"Precisely. Well, get your captain to allow you to come over to-morrow and we will send that cable. Also," he added after a moment's consideration, "we will fix up our own code and send a duplicate to your father. How does that strike you? Right. One must defend one's hand even at cut-throat. Now good-night . . . and, er, yes—you may go and say the same to the ladies."

CHAPTER VII.

THE *PADRONE* STROLLS SEAWARD.

"The ship sailed, and lo ! it was Friday."

On the twelfth of June the *Padrone* crept heavily out of the tangle of wharves fringing Oakland, and took her slack rivets past the *Magician* with a dipping of flags.

Captain Collins marched the poop, a man steered, a pilot stood near at hand ; a tug-boat, armed with a fat black funnel, rolled at the end of a tow-line—that was what appeared strolling resolutely towards the gates of the sea ; but behind it lay the comedy and tragedy of life, the hopes and aspirations of sailor-folk, even as they lie on the denizens of a city.

Captain Collins marched conscious of the fact that, after all his hustling, the Dutchman was not the first to sail. Mrs Collins and Nita, enjoying the knowledge, fluttered handkerchiefs, ostensibly as farewell to the *Magician's* captain ; but Philip, sheltered and glum at their exit, decided that the white signals were signals for him. He waved vigorously his reply, Freddy aiding in the demonstration.

On the poop above them Fahlun stood grim and saturnine, ordering the flags, which said "a pleasant passage to you," when the sentiment registered by his pose was plainly unrighteous. On the deck near at hand were Chips, Sails, and the bo'sun together, and hearty in the desire that "Collins was our skipper." Above them stood a person, Finch by name, picking his teeth, and breathing what is known among sailors as a prayer for departure. He considered the *Padrone* a coffin in embryo, and hoped the Lord would look sideways on her.

Meanwhile the gaunt ship crept seaward, carrying on

her decks a bunch of men who walked round the capstan brazenly advertising their purpose—

“We’re homeward bound across the sea,
Good-bye, fare you well ; good-bye, fare you well ;
We’re homeward bound to Liverpool town,
Hurrah ! my boys, we’re homeward bound !”

The thing was self-evident. So was the fact that they used a capstan worked by hand, while a steam-winch, snoozing comfortably with its coat on, lay idle in the donkey-house. What would you have ? Coals cost money. Even Collins was compelled to bow the knee here.

So the top-s’ls rose and grew taut of leech under the eye of a commander who knew how to handle both ship and men, and the tug crowed fussily ahead, informing men that it was she who performed these miracles ; that without her this warehouse could do nothing—nothing, cock - a - doodle - oo ! Not even find voice to crow.

Cheers went up as the great ship trailed past, and as it is not wise to advertise that one resents the action of a brother skipper, amidst the din came Collins’s message, shouted through a megaphone : “ We will tell them you are coming, Fahlun ! Good luck, and a pleasant trip to you.”

To this there was but one answer, and Fahlun gave it brassily—

“ I vill raze you, mein friendt ! Von hondret tollars ve peat you home !”

“ Right !” came the answer ; “ it’s a bet—so long, boys ! So long !”

This to Philip and his friend, standing screened from the “ Dutchman ” beneath the poop, and staring mistily at the white girl form slowly vanishing into wind-swept space.

Ensigns came to the salute. The warehouse moved out into the haze shrouding the Golden Gate, and the haze swallowed her. Anita was the last to take in her

signal, which to Philip meant "God-speed, and I love you,"—a glorious tonic, brimful of hope and of youth. And taking it in, she found her eyes had need of it—the white and flimsy bit of lace "the boy" had given her.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE *MAGICIAN* FOLLOWS HER.

"Outside the Gate 'clept Golden, a calm lay on the swell,
And 'twas here the crimp came aft, a notion the skipper to sell:
'Mynheer!' says he, 'I guess yew'll dew,
Ef yer chaps wake slack, why give 'em yer shew.
That's advice, ef I'm asked, an' gratis tew,
As will put the fear o' God right into yer crew,—
So long, Mynheer!
Yew'll dew, yew'll dew!'"

It was ten o'clock, and the day, dedicated of old time to Saturn, lay for all seers a day of Californian sunshine. Saeter-daeg, the day for saturnalia, and the day more especially loved by shipowners as the one on which it is necessary to hustle a vessel to sea.

No man of an acquisitive turn, in these days of hard competition, relishes the spectacle of a crew spending Sunday in port. Drunk or sober, ready or unready, out you go; Saturday, Friday, any day—if you are loaded, get steam and away. That is the order which has fallen upon the old dalliance with the sea, now that we have learned what business means.

"It is a sign of the beast," Jack asserts as he marches dead-beat to the sacrifice. "It is a sign of the times," says his Board of Directors, and the Agent who ordered the going of the *Magician* upheld them.

It appears that Jimmy Webster was desirous of starting with a crew who were sober, and suggested, in these days when it is necessary to earn dividends, a delay for that purpose. He said nothing of Sunday. That

would have been to court disaster at the outset, but he emphasised the view that drunken sailors are a hindrance and nothing else under the sun.

It appears, too, that Jimmy Webster was responsible for the sobriety of the crew who had bucked at the sight of the ferries, and Fahlun, conscious of danger, looked solemn at this new and hazardous proposal. Still it was his mate's, and he thought it wise to give it time. He chewed the cud on it, therefore, in the seclusion of his cabin, and, with the assistance of whisky, found it spurious. Then he gave it to the Agent, frowningly, with gutturals, and the Agent's agent came down to see Jimmy Webster. They thought it wise—because, well, you see Jimmy Webster was mate.

The Agent's agent was a person who was paid to go straight to the point. He was long, too, and he smoked a cigar like a reed.

"Seems tew me," he remarked, as he puffed at his ease, "that mates of British ships don't know enough to keep themselves warm."

He blew a cloud.

"Stay in an' get yer crew sober! You make me smile. What are yew here for, anyway?"

He expectorated gustily.

"Navigate, hey? Waal! that's talk. But it don't happen to co-in-cide with my definition of the thing."

He leaned forward and became the adviser.

"Lookee here, mister, yew're here to hustle your crew. We're here to hustle you. If we don't hustle you, I reckon Baker, Filcher, Thug, an' Company will find some one who will; an' if yew don't hustle, why, I guess *we* shall find some one who will."

The mate questioned here, rather pertinently he fancied—"What is the use of a crew when they are drunk?"

The Agent was stiff with surprise.

"Who says they will be drunk?" he questioned, cigar withdrawn.

"Oh—as far as that goes . . ."

"Come in out of the rain!" said the Agent. "Waal! I could laff!" He blew a cloud.

Then with a swift change of attitude he looked over his shoulder and said—

"If yew'd been a mate wuth your hash, I guess you'd have been seven days down the Pacific by this. As you weren't, I'm the re-cipient of your cargo owner's gas. He cables tew know if we've watered the grain, and whether it's likely to sprout. An' yew talk tew me of sobering your crew before sailing!

"Tell yew what it is, young man. Yew seem to have some old-world notion of your position an' would like tew pull the strings—but yew'll not pull them . . . unless you pull them how I tell you. Yew'll just understand that yew're in line with all other sailors an' have got tew hustle. Your nation wants feeding, I guess. Waal! sailors are the bottle-fillers—an' if yew ain't ready to start in filling to-morrow at sun-up, I guess we shall fire you out."

Then the Agent's agent went back to the place from which he had emerged, and Jimmy Webster sat down to think. And Jimmy Webster discovered that he must do what this man had told him to do. He came to this conclusion quite calmly, for, you see, the mate was one of those duffers who believe that a sailor may marry, and he had had the audacity to carry his belief to its logical conclusion.

That was what happened when the question of a fresh crew was merely a possible contingency, and it did not tend to smoothe matters when the boats which carried that crew appeared on the visible horizon.

Freddy and Larry were on the *Magician's* poop next day, about "sun-up," gloomily perfecting themselves in the art of cleaning brass-work,—an essential, it appears, in the making of officers for the Mercantile Marine,—when a procession appeared on the flat surface of the bay. The procession resolved itself presently into a flotilla of perhaps seven or eight boats, all heading for the warehouse they footed. The problem

of discovering what came engaged the two thereafter so largely that the polishing stood still. Then Jimmy Webster lifted his head on the scene with a tone that was new.

"Now then, you two! What the devil are you star-gazing at? Here! Get your gear together and tumble down out of it. The boats are coming."

The boys could have told him so much, but they obeyed in silence, for it is not wise on ships to give back answers, in spite of these days of generous equality. Besides, they had guessed there was fun on the horizon. Exactly what measure was in prospect they could not say. They waited open-mouthed to see.

The mate came from his room carrying several revolvers. "Here you are, Philip; take this shooting-iron and stay with me. Freddy, make yourself scarce. Up aloft with you on the main, and cast off gaskets—savvy? Larry! you get up for'ard and do the same.

"Sails, Chips, Bo'sun, Steward—come you with me. Here are your tools. Stand by. Gangway there!"

He crossed over and took his station beside Captain Fahlun on the break of the poop. The second mate, Finch, a blue-nose from St Johns, shipped in place of an officer who had been left behind because of his inability to snap, moved to the far side and stood watching. A gentleman of the bucco type this, wearing his "gun" like a citizen of the roaring West.

The boats drew near. They hung heavily on their oars. They appeared to be laden with bags; but Jimmy Webster, standing up there beside Fahlun, knew precisely what weight would be found in the bags and what on the bottom boards. He took his binoculars from the chart-room and examined the procession.

There were seven or eight boats, and the men who rowed wore the clean-boiled rag and the black long-sleeve cap of the runner community. Hard cases every one of them. Men accustomed to handle drugged sea-boys or revolvers with equal *sangfroid*.

For this is the manner of dealing with recalcitrant

sailor men and all the breed of shufflers maritime who object to sign articles in a vessel whose crew has gone to jail; or to work a warehouse obviously handicapped by the month of August and Cape Horn.

A crimp who knows his business has no qualms on this head. A ship requires a crew in order that she may proceed to sea. That is a problem easily resolvable by the aid of dollars, and the crimp employed by Captain Fahlun was not the man to throw money into the bay. He made his men drunk. Those who objected to making themselves drunk he drugged, and in the maudlin stage of their debauch signed them on and carried them like stuck pigs to the boat.

There are several methods of providing a ship with a crew. Some savour more or less of the press-gang; but the formula adopted by the crimp here drawn is generally found useful and expeditious. It is known as Shanghai-ing, which sounds funny, but in practice means sore heads.

The boats drew alongside.

One by one they approached the gangway and whipped their burden over the *Magician's* rail. There was but little fuss in the operation. It had been so often rehearsed that the runners had become masters in the art of dealing with this branch of their duties.

Jack drunk as the fabled forty tops'l-sheet blocks, Jack log-like and stupid, Jack retching from the effects of his libations, Jack dead of that hocus which had finished him—tall and short, young and old, farmer or sailor, it mattered nothing. They came up the ladders on the shoulders of the men who had bled them. They were carried up, hauled up by lines and carted to their home in the forecastle; and Mr Mate, standing on the grating beside the big, black crimp, checked off each bundle as it appeared.

Item—

"George Cavantos." A hunchback Greek in a shirt like a rainbow, whose name the crimp laboriously pronounced.

Tick.

The mate's pencil acknowledged the fact unquestioned. "Hans Sofen—Deutschman. Bully man that when he comes sober—you bet!" The crimp expatiated here after the manner of an Eastern slave-dealer appraising his wares.

Tick.

Again the mate's pencil registered the inevitable.

"Constantine." A Greek with a scar from eye to scalp, showing in a blue seam of flesh across the forehead. A man carried between two, his head lolling, inert.

Tick.

"Nicola." Subject of his Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Austria—a lank, heavy-jawed man with a pock-marked face and glazed eyes.

Tick.

"John Johnson." British in name only—his mouth sticky, a trap for flies.

Tick.

"Jack Somers, Calaboose Bill, Saltee Dick." Dead men all; men with names which may or may not have been theirs, but without exception men lifted on board, —some by the yard whip, some by hand, and passed by the aid of the after-guard to their home in the pit.

And the mate's pencil registered their entrance and exit without demur.

Then came an obvious Yank. A big man with shaven cheeks and a goatee beard, whom the whiff of salt air and a dash of spray had partially roused.

He arrived on the grating, where stood the mate and his guard with shooting-irons on hand, swaying and full of fierce invective. Then a swarthy Creole of the runner fraternity "downed" him scientifically, and he moved onward to the pit in the arms of men who had no need to brandish force.

"Walt. B. Sampson," said the crimp.

"Yankee?" questioned the mate.

"Shua."

"I don't like the look of him—I can't take him."

"Golly! then you go sea one han' short, Misser Mate."

"Can't do that either."

The crimp stood back patting the rail with one hand his teeth gleaming white in the yellow-brown visage. "I guess that fool-talk," he announced. "I kinder kal'clate Walt. B. Sampson hes shipped in thish-yer gol-dolled packet, an' ef you ask me, I guess he's gwine to sail in her.

"Who cashed his note, Misser Mate?" he questioned pertinently; "you or me? Me. Waal!" he expectorated violently. "Golly! Tink I'm gwine to lose . . ."

Tick.

"Neow yew're talkin'," he commented.

He noted the fact that the mate's pencil had acknowledged the receipt of Walt. B. Sampson; that he was passed, as indeed he had passed for his share in the toil necessary to carry this five thousand ton load of grain to the country which is too palsied to grow it, and too fatly smug to question the method by which it arrives.

There followed additional human items for the mate's inspection, and against the name of each was placed that little sign by which he admitted receipt.

Fourteen men and three boys. All of them drunk or hoccused. All of them robbed of three months' advance in order that the British nation might have that cargo of grain cheap; that it might be transformed into cheap bread and set before it on the cheap platters it has brought from Germany.

"Rule, Britannia! Britannia rules the waves;
Britons never, never, never shall be slaves!"

Jimmy Webster, the much-tried chief mate, had nothing to do with this phase. His business was to get as speedily as possible a crew which would work the ship to England, where, please God, he would chuck the sea and settle down on a potato-patch and hoe for a livelihood. He ticked them off to this end, and without much question, deciding in his mind that if by chance they happened to be farmers and not sailors,

he would have the additional pleasure and trial of licking them into shape out there where no backdoor exists and men must do or die. He turned from the recognition of these factors with the air of one who has long ago decided that it is unwise to cross a bridge before you come to it, and proceeded to tick off his men's belongings, as vouched for by the crimp.

The runners formed a line from the boat to the deck, and, aided by the after-guard, passed for each bundle of humanity already stowed in the pit a clean and crisp bed of straw; a bright tin pot and pannikin and plate, jingling and tied together with a rope-yarn; a shirt or two of flaming check, and a suit of sticky, yellow oilskins—"gear" allowed by the crimp as sufficient to carry the men "home."

A sailor who required more, obviously would be out of his sphere on the decks of this steel windjammer; and a crimp who would supply more from his share in that beggarly advance must of necessity be a philanthropist. Boots? Good heavens! a crimp is compelled to draw the line somewhere. He draws it at boots. And, on consideration, does that fact not go to show him as a person of some discrimination? For is not Jack usually provided with two feet, and is there not a slop-chest on board if he desire to cover them, and a skipper aching to sell—if there be wages due? A crimp, even if he be something of a philanthropist, admits the fact unquestioned.

Stockings? The argument stands good. Mufflers, cold-weather apparel, mits for service when the wheel is ice-bound, flannels—well, let the nation look to it, for it is plain that a crimp who draws the line at boots knows no conscience-clause which will compel him to supply mufflers.

The men and their kit having been duly stowed in the pit and a key turned upon them, the crimp and his runners were now at liberty to ring in the cable, make sail, and see the ship comfortably started on her voyage. Nature, time, and the mates would

speedily settle the matter of drugged sea-boys. A bucket of water, a belaying-pin, or, in extremity, a flourished revolver—coercion, in point of fact—have been known to produce marvellous alacrity, so the crimp argued. Any other method of tackling this difficult business of crew-getting would involve time and expense—a thing no pushful shipowner would suffer unprotesting. That at all hazards was a subject on which both Fahlun and Collins could speak with authority. Again, is San Francisco to be debarred the one means left to her of getting rid of undesirables? And must the nation waiting and clamorous for grain still wait and clamour?

So the *Magician* with her crowd of drugged sea-boys, and a crowd of runner's boats trailing astern, passed Alcatraz, entered the Golden Gate, and melted into the haze overlying the blue Pacific. And the runners spread sail and drank Captain Fahlun's health, and got themselves into the tug which should ferry them back to 'Frisco, precisely as at any other time, after similar adventures, they get themselves into their tug and are ferried home.

Then the ship passed from the control of a crimp to the control of a Dutchman.

The mate and the after-guard cleared up the decks; the "young gentlemen" swabbed up the spilt blood; Larry went to the wheel; and Captain Fahlun devoted himself to that task he found so difficult—giving orders in a tongue which he termed "onkindt"; while in the fo'c'sle bunks were a crowd of drugged sea-boys, all mercifully unconscious of their destiny.

And over them there waved the blood-red flag of England—an emblem no longer honestly sewn, but printed, cheap, in Germany.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MISTS CREEP OUT.

Now the *Magician* stole away from San Francisco, and passing through the channels came into a haze that was wet—like tears.

From out of unseen distances sounded the voices of horns and sirens clucking of the dangers over which they stood; warning sailors in raucous tones to keep away, to watch, and to be very careful. And the *Magician*, carrying gutterwise in her lead-coloured belly that load of grain, leaned towards the swell and rustled with her wings. It appeared that she desired to fly, to emulate the birds which already had swept up to watch her. Little flutterings and tremors ran down the great spread sails, advising her of the breeze that grew, and she fell back upon the swell like a steeplechaser too heavily handicapped. She lolled in her gait.

But shoreward, behind that blue line of mist, a clerk gravely touched off the news, and the cables thrilled response. The grain was *en route*. A crew had been found and the ship had sailed without further mishap. Those hungry ones, therefore, over in the East, who lived in dim cities swollen beyond government,—people who recked nothing of the distances from which they were fed,—would some day reap the harvest drowsing now on the Pacific slopes—reap it and learn nothing of how it had come to them or through what peril, caring only for the fact that it had come.

The cables said no word of handicap, nor of the haze which had grown to be a fog, nor of the silent, crewless ship sweating great drops of water from her clattering sails—as though she wept at the risks she faced. For are not these things included in the itinerary of all merchantmen, and was not the *Magician* and her cargo fully insured as became a prudent business firm facing

dangers? and had not the Board of Trade inspected the ship, examined her marks, and found her capable of carrying additional cargo?

But known dangers stand nowhere as bars to progress. It is the thing unseen that steps across our path with outstretched foot to trip us. Captain Fahlun admitted the handicap, but made no comment upon it. It was there to be faced, as at that moment he faced the thick, white mist; and the outlook in either case was grey—grey as the sides, slobbering there deep in the wanton sea.

A boy came up the poop ladder and began to coil down ropes. The noise he made awoke Captain Fahlun to the knowledge that he was wet, and that boys are provided by paternal shipowners to wait upon their superiors. It is the essence of seamanship, the alpha and omega of life on board ship, the acknowledged way to the monstrous dignity of command. Captain Fahlun admitted the fact, and, with chin thrust out, gave the order—

"Hey, you boy! Pring to me mine oilskins, andt call to me the made."

The guttural roll of his tongue suggested that he desired the presence of some bright-faced maid who should beguile the tedium of this slamming interval with love and kisses; but the boy had learned to discriminate in this as in other matters. He accepted his destiny without words, and, in the course of time, having found the mate, a forlorn young figure smudged with toil, towed him to the presence.

And the presence leaned forward clucking with his too fat tongue to inquire—

"Vot you of the handts make?"

"Drunk, sir—every man Jack of 'em," said Webster.

"Too padt vor vork?"

"Blind," came the answer, descriptively painting the conditions.

"Andt it is going to plow—holl'sch!"

The mate cast his eye over the smudged horizon and replied without hesitation, "That's so."

"Padt—tam padt," the skipper emphasised.

The mate crossed over and looked into the binnacle. He examined the hang-dog set of the sails clanging up there like grey boards, and returned to the captain's side.

"It may come out anywhere," he remarked, "and at any moment. Unpleasant if it comes this side of dawn."

"With the moon in berigee," the skipper put in as addenda, "ve vor squalls may look out—hey?"

"Apogee or perigee are all one hereabouts," said the mate with scant sympathy.

"Abogee andt berigee, mein friendt, are not von. But they habben each month dwice. If," he continued with laborious enunciation, "ve vor abogee andt berigee vait, ve to tam novhere gome—soh! give her stay-sails, Misder Made, give her stay-sails."

He expanded his chest, turned up the ends of a shaggy moustache, smeared the white mist from eyebrows which stood outlined in beads beneath the peak of his sou'-wester, and turned heavily to examine the compass.

"Full andt by, mine son. Goodt full is the vord—soh?"

Larry, grinding there at the wheel, admitted that he soh'd by edging the ship a trifle off the wind, and the skipper resumed his station beneath the weather-cloth.

He stood there listening to the noise set going by his order; heard Mister Mate, with the help of that after-guard on which men rely in times of stress, toiling at the halliards and braces of this four-masted unit—a unit which had got itself disentangled from one set of hindrances only to become involved in others.

An after-guard in these days is chiefly useful as a means of accomplishing duties which the men are either too insolent or too ignorant to accomplish. It matters little which view is taken. *In esse* the thing has a like result, and Fahlun acknowledged it.

He stood there behind the weather-cloth, an effigy of mankind, watchful, slow, addicted to drink, and engrossed solely by a desire to make the ship pay. He wished to earn the praise and perhaps the acknowledgment of that firm of skinflints who ordered him. He wished, too, to beat that *verflucht* skipper Collins;

and the details of crew-driving necessary, if these things were to be accomplished, grew piecemeal in his mind.

If Vebstair could not bring the grew-mans out, then should Finch try his hand. On the whole, Fahlun was inclined to let Finch go in and win; still, on consideration the mate stood first.

He questioned as he stood there, drinking in the moisture and staring into the blackness, whether the mate had go enough to bring the grew-mans on deck. He questioned it, head thrust out, solemn of visage.

The mists enwrapped him.

PHASE THE SECOND.—CARRYING THE GRAIN.

CHAPTER I.

COERCION.

"Her captain was a Dutchman, a man of little nous,
Who 'guessed' he fed his sailors on stuff he called 'lop-scouse';
But the men were dim with the weight of gin,
And lay quite prone their bunks within,
Sick of a disease called Shanghaiatus,
Caught of a crimp and a well-mixed hocus."

It was stated in San Francisco that the *Magician* was commanded by a "Dutchman" because of the linguistic stogginess of the British nation. People argued that it was necessary to carry at least one officer who could speak some language in addition to his own; and when commenting on the difficulties Fahlun had found with his crews, one of the papers suggested that if England wished in future to give the command of her ships to Englishmen, then it was necessary that the *Conway* and *Worcester* made language the prime educational test and left navigation to the engineers or to chance. An engineer, they asserted, can do all that is essential in getting a ship from port to port. A captain requires to be a linguist. All other considerations are secondary.

Of course one is scarcely a competent judge; but if Captain Fahlun's English is to be taken as a guide to his knowledge of Greek and Russian and Italian and Levanter, then but little weight remains in the argument. Profaner persons, like Jimmy Webster the chief mate, Philip and his friends in the half-deck, had no illusions on the subject. They said in plain words that

Old Failings was there because he had signed on for a smaller wage than any skipper sailing out of the port of Liverpool. They said, too, that Captain Fahlun was out of his element at sea, and would have made a bigger splash at a restaurant in the capacity of head waiter. But Philip and his friends, in lashing at the object which administered their world, forgot that Captain Fahlun was just a tool on the grindstone; and that among those who turned the handle was the British nation, with its insane desire for all things cheap.

Meanwhile night fell on the *Magician* dawdling over the seas outside the Golden Gate, and Captain Fahlun, reminiscent of that bet of his with the *Padrone's* skipper, called the mate once more to his side.

"Vot now, Mr Vebstair," he questioned a trifle brusquely,—“vot of them grew-mans?”

"Drunk, sir,—still drunk," said the mate.

"Zen you moust make zem on-tronk," said Fahlun, leaning forward and very earnest; "ze night gome in plack. Zey moust gome out."

"Very good, sir."

Still the mate remained without visible activity.

"Zey moust gome out at vonce!" the skipper emphasised. "Soh! I inzist."

The mate had no answer ready which appeared pertinent. The advisability of coercing a crew is never tackled readily in these days of subversive legislation. It carries risks, or, as the dragoon said of certain riots in Ireland, "There are too many brick-bats in the air and too little self-defence. It's not balmy." So with the crew of a windjammer. The question in the mate's mind was the abstruse one of making a German comprehend the futility of getting the "grew-mans" on deck when obviously they could not stand. But his hesitation incensed the commander, who scented insolence as a result of that lack of mental grip which was just natural.

"You to pring zem out are not avraid?" he questioned, but without intent. Avraid for him meant, perhaps, some solution of the thing we understand as

fear. Who shall say. His dull phlegmatic eyes and stolid face scarcely predicated the notion of insult; but the suggestion was there, and the mate turned on his heel.

"Afraid?" he threw out. "I guess not. I was thinking more of their use when we have them on deck."

He crossed over and stood at the head of the poop ladder. "Sails, Chips, Steward, Cook! come along here and stand by to lend a hand if necessary." He moved down and halted among them. "Mr Finch, I shall want you with me. Larry, go aft and take the wheel. Send Philip down to me. Bo'sun, you come forward too. I am going to rouse out the hands."

Some one sniggered in the darkness, and the chief turned on him at once. "Keep your teeth shut," he growled; "you may want them."

The six men walked forward and came to the door of the pit. The mate unlocked it and flung it wide. The iron clanged like the lid of a tank. A poisonous rush of air escaped from the den, and the mate stepped back.

"Phew!" he grunted. "Good God!"

Silence met him.

"Starboard watch turn out! Turn to!" he cried.

Some one rolled in a bunk far in the darkness, cursing a woman with whom apparently he fought.

"Andar la merida . . . poonietta! Biche! biche! . . . ah, you would . . . grandissima raga . . ."

The voice died, and thuds echoed in the blackness. Then again it rose like a wail, crying in its sorrowful Levanter of the thieving it mourned and the retribution now at hand. The ship's sails drummed far in the darkness.

The mate's voice leaped upon the jumble, drowning it and bringing it to a sudden halt. "D'you hear there! Turn out! Turn to! No nonsense now—d'you hear?"

And again came the jumbled drone far away in the dim recesses of the pit. The hiss and jeer of fulfilled vengeance, then the dull gurgling cry of one struck down.

"Light there!" said the mate. "Quick!"

The bo'sun moved in beside him and found a match. He applied it to the fore-castle lamp—a swinging grease-pot hanging beneath the sooty beams. The thing flared, giving out a smoky breath which ascended steadily and drew circles on the blackness.

The squeal was dead now and the thumper apparently mollified. The mate could discover nothing amidst those forward shadows. For the pit is a narrow barn of damp and ingrained dirt, an iron tank-like place fitted with shelves whereon the men were couched and tumbled. These filled two sides. A third held a table; the fourth a door. An unswept den, rusty, foul, with a greasy floor and five small round portlets, as though its builders designed to hide its ugliness from the sun. A place of discontent and devilish brooding,—a place designed by man to breed them.

Some one advanced with a globe-lamp brought lighted from the deck, and instantly a tall seaman rolled legs over the edge of his bunk.

"Git out o' this!" he snapped. "This is the sailor's hell; keep yew over the sill."

The man bundled to the deck, and lurched about truculent and pointing,—a man wearing a goatee beard and clad in a red shirt, open at the neck. His eyes were swollen and cut, his face had the appearance of one who had warred with cats. The mate, interrupted by this outburst, turned from probing any deeper that groaning mystery in the shadows.

"The Yank," he decided, facing him. "Walt. Sampson!" he cried out; "you seem fit. Out on deck, my son, and get to muster."

"Muster be gol-dolled!" said the man. "Git out yer-self."

He collapsed suddenly upon the bunk edge, twisting on his heel as though it were a pivot, and looked up with derision in his glance—derision qualified by a dazed and blear-eyed impudence which mated oddly with his twisted attitude.

The chief pointed out the fact that this man, in

common with the rest of the crew, had shipped, signed on, and had drawn three months' advance. He spoke quietly, almost in despair at the task set him to accomplish; but Sampson took him up.

He objected to turn to. He said so definitely, with elaborated point and emphasis. He announced his hatred of Britain and all things British. He had not signed on in any gol-dolled Limejuicer,¹ and if the cap'n was a wise man he'd turn tail and get back to 'Frisco right away.

"Let the ship blame-well sail herself," he reiterated, crookedly defiant. "Guess I'm not full up of shore life yet. Haven't bin a dog-watch off the all-fired briny . . . not much. An' if all hands is of my way of thinkin'," he shouted, flourishing one fist, "they'll see yew an' yer brass-bound² gang into the gates of hell before they do a handstir on yer flamin' hooker!"

Again he stood forth truculent and swaying; alternately spitting in his hands and pocketing them; squaring his shoulders to fight; chin thrust out, deep in the throes of question.

Forward in the gloom sounded the growl of the Levanter's prayers addressed to the thing which moaned.

"Wait a bit. Turn in and get a sleep," said the mate, making a step again towards discovery. But the man halted him, and at a sign from the mate those who were with him held back, waiting.

"Turn in be gol-dolled!" Sampson sneered. "How am I to turn in in such an all-fired hooker? Where," he questioned pertinently, "was his anti-Gallican sea chest that he took ashore dotty-well full o' duds? Where was his shore-goin' togs an' spring-sided boots? Where especially was his nine months' pay, hard earned and sewed up in a kafusalem belt? Before he would consider any question of turning to or turning in, he required an answer. If the skipper had his money, he might perhaps consider the propriety of handing it

¹ Yankee term for an English ship.

² Uniformed.

over. Was he to get an answer now, or was he to go aaft and interview the dirt-spread skipper?"

He sprawled there before the mate, demanding to be told; and the mate, anxious to keep the peace and to solve that other botherment, but desirous also of first stilling this tongue, replied that he had heard a yarn of that colour before; that it wouldn't wash; and that the best thing Sampson could do was to lie down and get sober.

Sampson resented the appeal with drunken energy. "Shut it!" he demanded. "Shut it, or I'll smash . . ." He paused, considering what part of the mate he would smash, and as suddenly forgot the point, whirled by a new issue. He raised his voice. "Hey, yous—any of yous there of the name—Herricks? If so, come out like a man an' bear witness."

He seized the mate by the arm. "Herricks knows me, Mister—knows I had a matter of a hundred an' twenty dollars in that belt. He can bear witness I never shipped in no wallowin' Limejuicer—an' wots more, he'll back me. Ho there! Herrick, my son, tumble up an' show yourself.

"Ye see," he explained as a lurch sent him floundering against the bunks,—“ye see Herrick's my pardner—savvy?"

They waited in a group while he moved along the tier of bunks examining them for signs of his chum. Mr Finch approached his chief at this, and whispered a suggestion which brought a sign in the negative, and again they waited. Herrick was not to be found. That was presently evident, for Sampson came back to face the little knot of officers growling and more dangerous than before.

"I've never sot eyes on yer all-fired skipper!" he asserted; "I've never signed on fer no juggling voyage round the Horn; an' I've never sot eyes on no three months' advance—now!"

He stepped up and stood throwing biting epithets at the mate and his supporters. "I'm a citizen of the Ju-nited States—U.S.A.," he explained in high derision;

"d'ye think I'm likely tew ship in a darned Limejuicer? Garn! Mister, take off'n them gilt bandages an' work the ship yerself."

Some of the after-guard crowding in the doorway sniggered at the insult, and Mister Mate caught the sound. It brought out the anger lying dormant and held in check by the knowledge of the man's condition, and he stepped forward face to face with the truculent sea-dog.

"I know nothing of who you are or where you hail from," he cried out, "but I know you've shipped here to work this ship and have drawn your three months' pay. Get out on deck!"

The big man drew back with a leer. "Shipmates!" he jeered, addressing that frowsy mob of sullen and drunken men, some of whom peered about, clutching at the bunk sides; "shipmates! ere's old tonic-sol-fa on the hi-ti. Come an' see a son o' the Ju-nited States knock chips off'n him."

He retreated a step and stood swaying with clenched fists. "Ever sot eyes on Jackson?" he questioned, grinning. "Wall—I guess that's me."

"Come out!" cried the mate.

"Yew fetch me," sneered his opponent. Then with a grim attempt at badinage,—“Mind! this-yere's sailor quarters. Him as steps over that sill plays a sailor's game—see?”

"I'll play you any game you like and anywhere," quoth the mate, and instantly clutched his man by the shoulder. "Out on deck every mother's son of you, and get to work!" he shouted.

He flung the man towards the pit's exit and he slammed upon the door.

Now this was foolishness. A man of the mate's intelligence could not fail to comprehend that half, at least, of the mothers' sons there present were sick of that disease Shanghaiatus, and could only lurch; while others were on the borderland of mutiny from the potency of the whisky with which they had been doctored.

But it is useless to expect wisdom from an officer confronted with open insolence and in the eye of a tittering audience. It immediately becomes a case of "you or me, my friend—you or me, right here."

Some of those who had remained hitherto as silent spectators of this duel now dropped from their bunks and jostled with the after-guard.

"Boy!" sneered Sampson, grinning, obviously at ease despite the force with which he had been hurled.

"Man!" shouted the mate, and his right hand shot out straight from the shoulder.

A moment every one stood in silence, and the groans from that forward bunk made fresh echo. Sampson reeled backward, but again he stood balanced, one hand pocketed,

"Get out!" cried the mate. "Out on deck!"

"Out yerself! Git . . ." The tall sea-dog lurched forward, dabbling at his jaw. He stood there measuring his distance, the goatee beard working. He raised one hand,—the hand he had withdrawn from his pocket,—and instantly the men in the doorway cried, "Look out, sir! Get outside! Fair play now . . ." and the opposing forces rushed together.

But Sampson's arm was already swinging. "Back yerself!" he roared out. "I'll fight ye sittin'."

The blow fell, a round-arm, slashing blow that took Mister Mate by surprise, lifting him from his feet.

"Lie thar!" came in stinging comment, "an' larn not to haze sailor-men."

The mate lay down. He made no effort to rise, for in the crush of men fighting in the dim light, the Levanter leaped from his bunk and came upon him with a knife blurred already of its brightness. Again it flashed, jabbing at the man who writhed.

"Carrajo! Phitoo! You steal-a my gell—you . . . you steal-a my clo'es—you . . . Phitoo—now I steal-a you—you . . ."

The dago sat astride his enemy, eyes glaring, shock of head, chattering, monkey-like, and brandishing a knife. A short, square-set man with rounded shoulders

and the suggestion of deformity. A Greek, George Cavantos by name, mad drunk and reminiscent of some devilry, in which apparently he stood at bay.

The crowd, swaying and dragging at each other in that narrow and pit-like arena, scarcely recognised the thing with which they were confronted. The after-guard saw that the mate was down and strove to reach him; the men, bent only on asserting their rights, met them. Blows fell. A pistol shot rang out—another. Groans came from some unseen sufferer; then, ringing in the darkness, came the voice of the big American. "Knives is it? Guess we don't want no knives har. Down him, sonny! Drop that tool—drop it, or . . ."

The scuffle near the pit's mouth rose in volume, overtopped the voice, and in the midst of it the mate was hauled on deck by a victorious after-guard. The pit's door clanged.

"Lock it!" said Authority. And the key was turned.

The men stood in a group beside the main hatch, Chips, Sails, Philip, and the second mate, panting, and in some cases bloody from the fray. Before them, silent and already at peace, was Jimmy Webster, chief mate, the man who had attempted coercion.

Far in the darkness the sails shivered, throwing great drops upon the hatch. They pattered about the shoulders of men stooping there in examination; ran down and mingled with other drops falling beside the hatch coamings, forming red patterns as they trickled towards the waterways. Then again Authority spoke in the person of a chief newly arrived.

"Guess that's his last fight, my sons. Pick him up and carry him aft. Gently does it! So—"

And from the distant poop came the shout of a "Dutchman" at war with events as they appeared.

"Square ze main yardt there yous—*schwein!* . . . Lay aaft ze wadch. Lay aaft!"

The black sails shivered overhead, iterating the command.

CHAPTER II.

AN INTERLUDE.

Fahlun was right when he predicted dirt, but he was wrong about the direction. The gale had come, but it had come fair—or, in other words, the order startling that procession of men from the main hatchway predicated a north-easter; the urgency of Fahlun's shout, the view he had formed of its entrance upon that world of tears and black darkness through which they crawled fluttering.

"Sguare ze main yardt!—*schwein!* Lay aaft ze wadch—lay aaft!"

Good. The watch, such as it was, moved aft, carrying their burden. Some of them limped in their gait. A black eye here, a swollen jaw there, a cut or two strewn haphazard among them, and a braced sense of the tragedy through which they moved,—that was the after-guard's share in this thing ordered and made possible by a person who sailed his ship on coercive principles and quavered at the feet of "starve-gut" owners when ashore.

Perhaps it was reaction which accounted for this metamorphosis—a reaction from the holy state of kowtow which was Captain Fahlun's one characteristic when at home—by which one predicates England. Perhaps it was the natural curvature of a mind which could not get in touch with the men whose country had accepted his services. Perhaps it was, as sometimes is the case with persons of small intelligence and swollen muscle, just the natural outcome of unrestricted authority, untrained, undisciplined governorship. Or perhaps it was the half-deck's dictum which accounted for the phase—drink. Drink taken by a coward to find him in courage. Who shall say? Sufficient that it is possible even in situations fraught with peril, and when cool heads are as essential as strong hands,

The watch moved aft, eight men of the after-guard carrying him who had led them forward. They placed him on the floor of his small cabin, covered him, and passed out to wrestle with that new hazard which had fallen upon them.

The wind roared in their ears. A flick of rain and hail, heralding the squall which marked its advent, met them full front. The sails spread up there in the black night clanged and fluttered with the noise of sectional rifle fire; staysails jingled, flapping in a breeze which took them endwise; sheet blocks pounded on rail and deck, and through the uproar came snapped suggestions of the skipper's mood.

"Crossyack brazes there yous! Slag away, mister—slag away!"

He moved across the poop mouthing his orders, urgent to see this thing begun.

"Vy in hell you no come quick? Slag away. Move around there yous! Haul or ve aback vill be. . . . Vebstair—*verflucht*—tam my soul andt puttons—vy you no answer—heh?" He loomed monstrous as a shadow on the poop.

"Mr Webster's not here!" the second mate yelled, responsive and equally blasphemous at the state in which he found the ropes. "He's dead."

"Vot?"

Finch turned from his struggle with the ropes, which apparently were combined to hinder him, and faced the shadow on the poop. "He's dead!" he shouted.

"Tead-tronk?"

"No, sir, dead. Todt—morto—sent in his cheques. . . . Ay, slack away it is."

Despite the clamorous wind and slapping canvas the skipper advanced to the head of the ladder, a heavy personage in silhouette, pressing his question.

"Holle!" he growled. "Vot mean you?"

Again Finch made a trumpet of one hand and shouted, "Some blame Dago knifed him, sir. There was a bit of a shindy for'ud. Wait a bit. We'll fix 'em."

He struggled persistently with the braces, which

unquestionably were mutinous as the men indicted, holding the ropes in one hand and shaking out the coils with the other.

The after-guard sang drearily, squaring the yards.

"Let things slide a bit, sir," he urged. "Damn! this is enough. Let's get fixed . . . they're all locked in, fighting it out. When we're ready I guess we'll give 'em dead."

The skipper turned his broad back on this advice, moving to windward. "Goodt," he said in laborious accent, "ve vill."

The after-guard, sweating at the heavy yards in that blinding downpour, rain in their eyes, rain trickling from the sodden ropes to their armpits, rain searching out the crannies and doublings of collars and oilskins only hurriedly donned, halloed with the voice of men weary of battle, weary of this unending round of duties not theirs, and swore as loudly as the pair who commanded them.

A cook and a steward, even in these days of meagre crews, scarcely ship with the intention of fighting the sea on deck; they are content to watch others fight it, and prepared to do as little as possible of that other duty for which, admittedly, they shipped. A bo'sun, carpenter, and sailmaker, too, expect to get their quantum of sleep. They are all-night-in personages the aristocrats of a windjammer. They are tradesmen, who, if they are called out to shorten sail, look glum, and certainly do not expect to work the ship at night and work at their trades by day.

Still, they acknowledged that this was an exceptional business, necessary if they were to get started on that voyage which should bring them home; so they continued to haul braces, down staysails, and ease off sheets until the canvas was trimmed and less noise accompanied them on their march through space.

Without lights, without any semblance of look-out— if one excepts the incidental glances of a skipper immersed in the duties of squaring yards—without caution, order, or any pretence of it, so the *Magician*

followed in the wake of the *Padrone*, and started with her five thousand ton load of grain for that island nation who demanded it.

And in place of the mists there had come rain and wind, and a sea which leapt in curves of phosphorescence beneath the counter. Sky and sea and ship and people were painted all in one dead level of blackness. A blackness through which the wind moved moaning. A blackness flecked by points of light which were born, lived, moved, and died all in the turn of a wave crest.

And forward, in the pit, was the sound of battle, the roar of voices savagely demanding the opening of those doors which kept men prisoners.

CHAPTER III.

THE LORD OF THIS PUZZLE.

A dead chief mate. A mutinous crew. An after-guard obviously unfit for any extended effort of the sort looming in the forefront of things. That was the puzzle with which Fahlun was faced, and he faced it with the stoical unconcern of his race.

In these days of half-manned ships it is necessary, if the captain is not to do the fighting himself, to engage an officer who is competent. If a ship is to make a passage she must be driven. If the ship be driven, then it goes without saying the crew will be driven. And if they object to "move smartly," as the saying goes, the person shipped to do the driving comes largely to the front.

Captain Fahlun had secured such a personage in Finch, the "blue-nose"¹ mate, and he had but little

¹ I.e., Nova Scotian.

doubt of the result. He walked the poop, therefore, in all confidence; gave his order for "Galashee vatch," and noted the business of squaring yards in peace. His voice only rose occasionally. The rain ceased. The gale settled down and blew steadily—a fair wind. It mattered nothing to Fahlun whether the crew remained obdurate or whether they were exterminated in that pit which held them. The ship rushed onward, gurgling with her scuppers.

The sound was music in the ears of a "Dutchman" who desired above all things to beat that *verflucht* skipper, Collins,—the man who had stolen a march upon him with the help of a satisfied crew. He questioned whether it were not possible that Collins had been at the back of the whole business which had conspired to delay him. He acknowledged that it was credible. Such things have happened before, will happen again; but if Collins thought that he was going to give in because of the miserable handicap with which he was faced, he little knew Fahlun, or Fahlun's nation. A German, he accentuated, staring into the turmoil beneath the counter, and marking the challenging passage of growing waves beating flat against the iron of his ship, a German with his hand in control will find a way to make it felt. There will come a day, he decided, when German energy and German method shall the English nation ride over. A *verflucht* people! Damned by cocksurenness—like sparrows in the presence of the resourceful cuckoo.

Collins was a specimen. And he had a whole day's start despite his meandering delay over the question of a few sheered rivets! That was the matter which drummed in Fahlun's ears. A day's start. And now by the irony of events he found the *Magician* still further handicapped by the presence of a mutinous crew,—perhaps that too was of Collins's contrivance.

Good. But there are methods of dealing with a crew which refuses duty, and Fahlun was the man to adopt them. "*Holl'sch!*"—he hissed the word, glaring under bushy eyebrows at the rising sea, and speaking

the mother-tongue as was his wont in soliloquy,—“the man who myself can beat shall himself my master be.”

He stood on the break of the poop when the light of a glum dawn first peeped out upon the scene. A yellow gleam escaped the piled clouds, massed and rugged astern, and it fell on the rolling ship in bars which lighted the greyness, showing the misty outlook, the charging monsters, the world clad in a vapour thrown from sea to heaven and ascending like the smoke of a great fire, rolling and impotent in the grip of the men who have smothered it.

The ship swayed onward, dipping her nose in the foam. She wallowed down the slopes as they moved upon her, filching water from their sides, drawing foam lines with sheet and brace blocks, throwing spray clouds to swell the mistiness with which she was girt. She appeared thirsty, and like a horse crossing a stream, stopped to lave her hot nostrils in the coolness. She lapped greedily, spilling the water upon her. She seemed desirous of lying flat in it, but rolled onward, dipping now with one side, now with the other, and filling her decks. The waters clanged from rail to rail with each swinging roll, and gushed waist high about the masts and winches.

But within the pit the roar of voices had subsided, and a steady hammering had arisen instead,—a hammering drowned by the noisy seas and unheard by those who walked the poop watching the growing gale.

Fahlun stood there examining the outlook. Bad, he decided. A gale—and a mutinous crew—bad. In other circumstances the thing he desired; the thing which would rush him up with the *Padrone*, dawdling perhaps, and taking it easy because of those rivets. But bad—bad. He marched to the head of the ladder and stood there staring at the wash—an untrimmed effigy of mankind, eyes red, moustache and beard rimed with salt, sipping at a cup of coffee just brought him by the steward. His appearance was disreputable, his glance dull; but when presently the sailmaker opened the door of his room and stood watching for an oppor-

tunity to cross the deck, the ruling passion asserted itself.

"Zails," he cried, "come here."

The sailmaker arrived at the head of the ladder. He carried beneath his arm a length of canvas, obviously new.

"Vot you going to do vith that?" Fahlun questioned pertinently.

"Sew up the mate, sir. Mr Finch said . . ."

"But it is new sduff!" Fahlun expostulated, eyebrows lifted, head thrust out. "Have ve no second-handt?"

The sailmaker admitted that old canvas was plentiful and stood silent, staring into the greyness. But he added, "It's for the mate, sir. I'm goin' to sew him up."

"Vell, and vill not second-handt sduff do as vell?"

Sails had no words to express his opinion. He was a small man, one of the after-guard, sodden at the moment and very weary. The thing he desired was a week's sleep—something to remember. The captain hammered in his desire—

"Get me some second-handt sduff. New ganvass may come in some day for somesings. Ve cannot sbare it. A goodt piece off second-handt sduff. He vill not feel it is second-handt." The last phrase he pushed out as though in apology, or to propitiate a sailmaker whose eyes registered a protest.

The sailmaker retired discomfited. He had his own views, but he was weary, and desired to consult those other denizens of the house in which he lived.

Trelanick, the carpenter, more usually known as Chips, coincided. He called Philip and the cook and bo'sun to witness that he was not going to have any hand in cheeseparing when it came to a matter of such solemnity.

"We'm goin' to bury her decent," he decided, "or we'm not goin' to bury at all. Let the old man understand that without any more talk. New canvas—a good piece of iron an' the flag to cover her—that's what we'm goin' to give her, an' if the old man has other views, let her bury her herself."

He stood there with cut brow and eyes already blackening, giving his opinion to the others. They agreed, adding trenchant comment. At that moment it appeared that if Fahlun enforced his theories he would find a second mutiny on hand, and no helpers in that question of coercion which yet had to be faced.

"It's damnable," Philip asserted, standing for the half deck. "The old man hasn't so much as looked to see if he's dead. He's only concerned to run the thing on the cheap. Let him fight his own battles."

"Let him go to hell," the cook decided, his black face black with portent. "Guess he c'n cook his own grub if he stands to that."

"And work his ship," the bo'sun shouted. "I'm full up."

"We're all full up," they decided, raging at the fact that at this juncture they, of all men, could not say so.

Finch, the second mate, came to the door at this, demanding the presence of all hands, and to him they gave their views. The mate had not been properly backed. The old man had done his best always to snub him. The last second mate had got his injuries entirely because the old man was a skunk. Let him look to it. The grub was pretty bad, the treatment a trifle worse. If he didn't alter his tune he might fight all hands, crew and after-guard combined. Why, the mate was a better man than all the "Dutchmen" born! And he would insult him—chuck him overboard in a bit of dirty canvas, a played-out rag that . . .

Finch cast his eye over this rugged bunch of warriors, and decided that they required a touch of the spur—"All hands?" he commented. "Waal—I guess that's business."

"The old man 'll find it's business if he forces——".

"Pish! whose talking of force?"

"You seem to think . . ." Sails commenced and paused.

"Look here, sonny," Finch interjected, grimly suggestive in attitude, "yew don't know me. I never 'seem to' anything. I just dew."

He loosened his oilskins and a revolver appeared. "See that nail head?" he questioned, pointing to the farther bulkhead. "Waal—I'll drive it home."

The revolver cracked in the narrow room, and when the men turned to see they found no nail, but just a hole bored deep in the wood.

Finch replaced his revolver, a strong man, careless of issues. "Guess I'm your chief now, sons," he threw out in that menacing fashion which was his by right of conquest. "Guess I don't want tew hear no palaver. Guess yew an' me 'll kind o' hitch in an' pull things through—eh? Guess there's not goin' tew be any more back-talk—savvy?"

No one spoke. His audience were the after-guard—men who at this moment stood between the devil and the deep sea; men whom Finch apparently designed to drive.

"Good," said the mate; "neow we c'n get tew business."

He proceeded with a summary of the situation as it stood in his mind.

"Sails, yew object, fur as I c'n see, tew usin' second-hand canvas on the mate. Waal—there's sense in that. The old man would admit it—use the new.

"Chips, yew have a sort of hankerin' tew use a piece of new iron, an' the cook wants a flag. Good, use 'em an' get to work.

"Doctor, yew an' me may have words yet; but understand, I want no fool-talk, an' I'll have clean funnels. That yew can bet on, high.

"I'm the mate," he emphasised, the pocketed revolver in evidence. "If Mr Webster had been a mate wuth his hash he'd not want burial now. Yew take me? Good. Let's hear from yew soon as yew like."

He left the room with a clanged door and passed through the wash to the poop.

The after-guard had something to say, but they said it with clenched teeth, and decided to proceed with the business in hand. There is power in a flourished revolver, especially when the man who wields it has the trick of aim.

Seven bells. A grey-clad seascape. A white blotch where the sun should have sent forth rays—and the slobbering lurch of a ship too deep, a ship whose decks already had the semblance of a half-tide rock, to accompany that procession of weary men, carrying shoulder-high their burden.

Fahlun stood at the head of the ladder examining the sky, sextant in hand. The question of "sights" appealed to him more forcibly than the necessities entailed by the procession. Given a glimpse of the sun, it was possible to find the ship's position; given none, there remained the task of burying a dead man—a man who had not understood the first law in all matters concerning coercion. There was no comparison.

A hammer clanged in the forward greyness, ringing hard, iron to iron. No one heard.

The sun remained with its veil drawn, and Fahlun descended to the main deck, where a platform had been fixed high out of reach of the seas. Sails and the bos'un stood at the head of the hatch—a flag-draped figure cumbering it. The rest of the after-guard moved over to the fore braces, but Fahlun read their design and recalled them.

"Come here!" he ordered. "I to read the service commence."

He removed his hat, and stood there droning words with the solicitude of one sampling for the first time a foreign tongue. He struggled gamely for pronunciation, but the phrasing baffled him. It would take too long, he decided. The service as it stood was unending; the prayers impossible in sequence. He questioned whether he had the right place, and turned a page to discover at the bottom of it a sentence which pointed directly to the end.

He droned more words, skipped half a page, then, standing erect and wind-tossed, he commenced—

"I gomit this pody to the . . ."

Sails glanced up at this, and, touching his arm, drew his attention to the condition of the yards.

"Vot?" Fahlun questioned, chin thrust out, at pause.

"You've not brought her round, sir," said the bos'un.

"Brought her roundt—vy?"

"Usual thing, sir, in English ships," said the bos'un.

"Vell—then ve make it onusual. Vere are the handts to pring to with—hey?"

The bos'un looked across at his friends and, gathering that they sided with him, said, "Oh, we'll manage it, sir—never fear about that."

Again the hammer clanged.

Fahlun glanced up, a swift questioning look. The noise ceased.

"I can't stop," he decided; "to pring to ve must glue up sail. Ve gannot glue up sail. I go on mit the service." He proceeded to read the service—"I gomit this pody to the deep—" and looked up.

The plank lay untouched by the men at its head.

"Dip!" said the skipper.

No one moved.

"Dip!" he cried again.

Finch, the mate, who had remained on the poop, approached the hatch at this and gave the necessary inclination. The body slipped down and splashed in the sea. In a moment it had disappeared from sight.

"Amen!" said the skipper.

Then, without pause, he glanced about him, marking the sullen looks. He put on his cap.

"Misder Vinch," he said, "I bromode you—Made."

The new mate acknowledged the dignity by a salute.

"Philip Devine," the skipper resumed, his eye falling on the tall young figure standing flushed and angry at the bos'un's elbow, "I bromode you second mate."

"Thank you, sir. I have no wish to serve," said Philip.

"You no vish to serve—vy not?" came the question from pursed lips.

"I'd rather remain in the half-deck, sir, thank you."

"Get your things into the gabin," Fahlun growled, "or ve vill——"

He paused suddenly, and glanced at the bos'un.

"Goodt!" he decided. "I haff you forgotten. Bo'sun, I you bromode to second made."

The bo'sun touched his cap.

"Thankee, sir, I'll stay wiv my mates," he decided.

"Soh?" said the skipper.

"If you please," said the bo'sun.

The skipper turned to the sail-maker. He had a mind to probe this matter farther, to discover if possible how deep was the sore.

"Zails," he cried, "how you like to be my second made—hey?"

"I'd as lief not," came the answer, declining to be cajoled.

The skipper turned to face the trio. "Soh!" he growled, "you to the gabin vill not gome. Goodt. Ven next I ask you, you gome quick, quick I tell you, mit a hook—hey? Get for'ud!"

The group closed in, one upon the other, and stood to front him.

"Vell, vy you no do as I dell you—hey?"

"Because," said Philip, with a new pallor on cheek and temple, "we don't care about working the ship any longer single-handed. That's it, eh, bo'sun?"

"Kerrect," said the big man,—*"kerrect, my son."*

"And because we think it's nearly time something was done to arrange matters with the hands. We can't work this ship round Cape Horn, Cap'n Fahlun—it isn't reason."

"Vont—you mean, hey?" Fahlun sneered. "Vy not sbeak plain?"

"It comes to the same thing," said Philip.

"That is vot you think, then?"

"Yes, sir—that is it precisely."

"Andt you?"

Fahlun directed his gaze at the sail-maker.

"I do, sir."

"Andt you?"

The bo'sun received the frowning question with the stolidity of all Bristolians.

"And me," he announced, grimly satirical.

The captain turned on his heel and moved towards the poop, where stood the mate, a silent watcher of what passed.

"Goodt," he announced heavily. "I vill think of vot you say. Mr Vinch," he looked up and caught that gentleman's eye, "Mr Vinch, vot you vant to do, hey,—standt by me or go vith them?"

Mr Finch accepted the proposition in all seriousness. "I stand by you, sir," he decided.

"Goodt. Then ve dake the ship home ourselves—hein?"

The hammering had ceased. It appeared from the silence regnant now in the pit that the men had destroyed each other, and that Fahlun's decision was in the way of fulfilment.

CHAPTER IV

THE BLUE-NOSE MATE.

The black night was gone, and in place of it there reigned a grey twilight—a twilight blotched and dimmed by charging banks of cloud; by seas climbing hourly in height—seas marching foam-capped to whelm the grey bulk of this grain carrier, groaning already under the burden which crippled her.

A long-waisted monster she appeared in the gloom of that sick dawn, a monster whose decks ran white with spume. Finch, standing on the poop while Fahlun took his breakfast, had no words to express his contempt of her. She was British, a tank of the Limejuicer brand; a specimen of unvarnished economy in which only fools or hard-ups suffer. Finch recognised very distinctly how he came to stand there, although he was not prepared to put the fact in words. He had been "on the

loose." That he admitted. Things had gone wrong with him in consequence. There was a small matter of shooting to be accounted for in 'Frisco, if ever 'Frisco held him again; and there was that other business which had grown at "the islands" last trip. No—on the whole it would not have been wise of Mr Finch to give tongue to the precise limit of his adventures. He examined the *Magician* instead, tongue in cheek at her antics in "this popple."

That is how he phrased it,—“this popple,”—and his mind fell away at a tangent to consider the question of “the greybeards” as they move off Cape Horn.

The subject was alluring. It presented room for the imagination. A subject demonstrable easily by those who are conversant with the theory of the Transverse Metacentre, who understand the application of half ordinates and the dangers of a deficient initial stability. But Finch was not versed in these matters. He only knew that the *Magician* “kicked up an eternal dust over nothing very tall in the way of a sea,” and paused to ruminate upon the fact.

He stood near the wheel, on the weather side, swaying to the sumptuous lurches and noting the burying process performed by the ship's nose,—a point in the dim distance on which it seemed that she desired to stand.

“Too much after-canvas,” he decided, viewing the spread shutters rising in the gloom. “Guess we'll have tew shorten down aaft—an' that,” he added by way of corollary, “means the crew.”

A squall drove up on the quarter, lashing the horizon with a line of foam. Finch discovered its approach and drew his oilskin close, buttoning the collar.

Larry was struggling with the wheel, a forlorn figure in yellow, girdled at the waist and ankles like a navvy, when Finch turned to admonish him of the advancing stress.

“That's a squall, my son,” he announced, “black as the Earl of Hell's riding-boots. You stand by to meet her—savvy?”



He took up a station by the vang fall, one hand gripping the rope, and stared into the black arch of cloud. It advanced hissing, the sea under it licked white.

"Mind your weather hellum! Don't let her gripe!" he growled over his shoulder. Then, as the danger he wished to avoid appeared, he moved down to front the binnacle—emphasising his order.

"Up with her—up!" he admonished, motioning with his hand to make plain his desire. "Up, I say, or yew'll shake the guts out of her. Hear me speak? Snakes and General Jackson! why don't you let her have it? Caan't? Waal, I should smile."

He halted there, quizzically expectant, watching this curiosity, intent on what came.

The squall rushed upon them booming, and the *Magician*, despite the angled rudder, swung up to windward until the leeches lifted and a roar of shaking canvas added to the clamorous note of the wind.

Finch moved to leeward and gripped the spokes, throwing his full weight upon them.

"Up with her!" he growled. "By the living God, but she's a beauty! Gripe, eh? Lord save us! heave on them spokes—heave!"

Oaths and prayers tumbled in grotesque fashion from this man's lips; strange, fantastic, blasphemous words that fell on the boy's ears with all the strength of a new vocabulary—a vocabulary heard now amidst the crash of hail and wind for the first time. They drew pictures in the lad's imagination, pointing to the intensity of the passions hugged there within those close-set teeth.

There was no excitement evident in this display. They were just words used without premeditation or alarm; spoken plainly while with his eyes he watched the leeches up there where the wind hummed.

He marked the danger they approached, acknowledging that this time they had evaded it, and that before another trial came it would be wise to get that after-canvas furled. Obviously the ship was handicapped.

The wheel was nearly useless while that towering array of shutters remained fan-like across the stern.

With a crew on deck affairs would scarcely have stood thus—for Fahlun, despite his deficiencies, was a sailor of the kind that only the north produces. A trifle slower than the average Englishman, a trifle less far-seeing—still, one of the race from which we have drawn much blood, and one with many points worthy of attention.

But here was no crew in any sane meaning of the word—only a rather cantankerous after-guard, and a mob of men still jammed in the forecabin curing of their hocus.

Well—one method of bringing the whole lot to their bearings was to scare the soul-case out of them, as Finch had suggested already. The other, a more sanguinary method, coercion at the revolver's end. But this had its drawbacks. Finch had acknowledged as much when Fahlun put the matter before him. They couldn't afford to shoot men. They were short-handed at the outset, and since then matters had not run smoothly. There was no saying, with precision, how many had gone under in the scrimmage led so gingerly by Webster.

But Webster had paid the penalty. A new chief mate reigned,—a person of the bucco type; a hard-case "drover" from one of the hell ships of the islands.

He stood on the poop, lined and scarred by weather and those fights from which he had emerged, staring into the throat of this gale which had come to baffle them, and questioning in his mind how he might get the crew on deck. That they must come on deck was evident. That they would come on deck when the doors were opened was also evident. It was the manner of their coming that would have weighed with any officer of Webster's upbringing—but with Finch!

He turned from a prolonged stare into the heart of the gale and approached the wheel. He took off his coat. Oilskins are cumbersome, they prevent quick movement; therefore Finch disrobed so far, and left the garments within the chart-room. He came back

to the wheel, hands in pocket, the revolver plainly outlined by his drawn coat.

"Look out for her," he snarled; "I'm goin' to take a look for'ud—savvy?"

Larry acknowledged that he understood, and the mate lounged out of sight.

There is no other word which describes exactly this officer's method of progression: he did not walk, he just covered the ground in a lounge—a tall man, heavy and muscular, with a goatee beard and moustache, shaven cheeks, high square shoulders, and the elasticity of a hare. A man with a glance which bit.

He came to the lee door of the pit and stood listening. The hammering had ceased. From within came the sound of voices, subdued, muffled by the iron which caged them. They were sober now. A night in the pit had wrought this change, starvation helping. Scared! So Mr Finch diagnosed the position, fumbling meanwhile for that key he held. He advanced to the door, inserted the key, turned it, flung the iron clanging on its hinges, and stepped back.

"Hands on deck!" he growled. "Turn to."

It was as though he recognised no unusual circumstances; as though, after an authorised release from work, he bade them again take up their duty.

The order found an echo within. Finch stood back, swaying lazily to the lurches, hands pocketed, shoulders bunched, legs apart.

"On deck now!" he reiterated. "Don't let me hev tew speak twice. D'yew hear me? Turn to."

A pair of "Dutchmen" advanced to the exit, looked out, and stepped threateningly over the washboard.

"Ve want to know vot sort of vork you call this——" one commenced, pale to the lips, but Finch cut him short.

"Shut your teeth!" he growled, "and git aaft."

He made no movement but just fronted them, held them with his eyes—a man with hands in pocket, swaying to the lurches. The "Dutchmen" stood at pause, waiting, perhaps, for those others who should

have backed them. The mate took a step in their direction, half withdrawing one hand from the pocket which warmed it—an action which carried a meaning.

"Aaft, Bismark!" he hissed, caustic of intonation. "Port side—git!"

The "Dutchmen" acknowledged their master, and moved through the greyness. Finch eyed them as they passed, the incarnation of cold audacity.

"When I speak," he growled in tones which whipped, "yew'll stand ready to yump; but when I shout," he raised his voice, "yew'll pick up yer gol-dolled wings an' fly—savvy?"

The "Dutchmen" trailed through the wash like pigeons bereft of one pinion. They accepted their destiny without speech. Aft? Well—at all events the thing meant freedom from the pit—perhaps breakfast. They moved to seek it.

A Dago came excitedly to the doorway flourishing his hands, chattering—the man inventoried as Calaboose Bill by that crimp who was also something of a humourist.

"I no caree do ze vork," he announced, shrugging his shoulders, the epitome of objection passive and declared. "I no sign-a los articulos—no touch-a paper—nada. I see-a capin . . . I go——"

"Awanta!"

The man stood twisting his cap, a prisoner in the mate's hands.

"Pasar a popa," came the order, "estribor costado!"¹

"Si, señor."

A sea advanced, hissing to windward, and he ran for shelter, clinging to the gear as the water surged down the sloping decks. He glared from his perch at the dangers he faced, and found them surmountable—with the aid, perhaps, of piloto.

Finch scarcely stirred. He glanced over the rail towards that quarter whence came the squalls, and found no cause for haste. "Three," he announced,

¹ Get aft—starboard side.

grimly sarcastic; "it's well I know their darned lingo." He drew himself up a trifle stiffly, pride mantling him, —the pride of one who knew precisely how to deal with the type presented.

A sound rose within the pit's mouth, and he turned round.

"On deck there, all hands!" he intoned, the vernacular again predominant. "Let's see yew—let's hear from yew—Walt. P. Sampson especially. Outside, my son—I'm gettin' cold."

A bunch of tatterdemalions advanced at a rush—a German, a Greek, a couple of long-shoremen, and a Cockney of the lower plane. They jostled with each other in the doorway making haste to be first, drew back at the sight of that tall and sinister figure, pushed into a herd, and stood snapping their defiance in his face. The gutter phrases of three languages rolled there for him to choose extracts. He took no heed. The men tumbled one upon the other in their annoyance, and in response to the cries of those behind in the pit. Still Finch watched—a fascinating stare. The Cockney tumbled to the front, shouting his views—

"Who are you anyway, with yer hi-ti, yer 'come out of it,' an' yer bloomin' cheek? Wot d'ye mean, any'ow, by lockin' chaps in the bloomin' . . . If y'er a man put up yer dooks! no bloomin' larks—come out!"

Finch remained quite still, poised, ready to pounce. The man advanced, airing his grievances. He struck out. Finch stepped back, and in a moment the hand had slipped from his pocket and the Cockney lay stunned at his feet.

"Pick him up!" Finch shouted, unmoved. "Carry him out of the slosh—d'ye hear?"

He took a step forward, a lurch which shadowed so much that the men complied without further argument.

"Eight," said the mate. "Good. We're gettin' a muster."

He pocketed his hand, deliberately ridding his knuckles of their armour. Aft, on the break of the poop, Fahlun acknowledged his prowess by a gesture.

On the main deck beneath him were the after-guard, watching and acting under his orders.

Matters were proceeding quite amicably. It was like shelling peas. You open the pod and press—the peas come tumbling out. Finch moved to the door of the pit.

"Walt. P. Sampson!" he cried, "I'm waitin' fer yew—an' yew know it. Come out, my son, an' no more ma-lingerin'."

A voice joined at this—

"Come out be gol-dolled," it said. "Yew fetch me."

"It's a thing I c'n dew," the mate intoned.

He stepped within.

The big American seaman confronted him. There were others, six if the muster stood at its original number, but they did not count. The tall American was the only one who counted in Finch's estimation, and he confronted him.

"Guess yew're winged," he decided, casually examining him.

The man blinked. He stood there bruised and haggard from last night's battle,—one arm swathed in rough bandages, his eye cut, his clothes torn,—the ghost of a fighter.

"That's so," he admitted, with a droop. Then swiftly cognisant of it, his voice fell into the old key—

"An' ef I weren't winged, how long d'yew think yew'd stand there hazin' us? Not long, I guess, not long. An' ef I had had men tew back me instead of this all-fired crowd of Kaisers, how long d'yew think yew'd hev kep us hyar? Not long, I guess—an' yew know it.

"Where," he questioned, grimly defiant in spite of the torture, "is the man who started this biz—anyway? Trot him along. Let's look at him. Mate, weren't he? Good. Trundle him along—let's see his paces—neow. Tenderfoot! That ar locates him, I guess.

"Haze me, would he? Waal—I'll be gol-dolled if that don't beat cre-ation. Haze Walt. Samp——"

"Hold your gas!"

"Like hell I will."

He flung out the phrase with a savage intensity that was appalling, but the words ended in a twist, a writhe. He collapsed upon a sea-chest, and sat there staring vacantly at the bunk boards.

In the black depths of the pit's extremity stood other figures, watching and in silence. Finch advanced, turning back his cuffs.

"Show me your arm," he demanded.

Sampson made no sort of objection. He sat there inert, bloody of aspect, scratched and mauled in a fashion which suggested conflict with a tiger. Finch unwound the towel. He came upon a scarf used bandage-wise, and deftly rolled it from the arm. A gaping wound, ragged, jagged, pulsing blood, lay disclosed to view. The man's eyes were closed. A twitching of the muscles, the only evidence that he felt.

Finch bent over, handling him with the dexterity of one accustomed to the swift decisions of the casualty ward.

Ripped artery, muscles, tendons—a chunk of the fore arm literally torn out. "All tew hell," was his comment. "How?"

"Chewed, I guess," said the man.

The mate cast his eye down the fore-castle,—“Find me a piece of wood, a foot long, thick as my thumb,” he ordered.

Some one moved away and fetched what was required. Then Finch released the pressure he had placed on the arm, and rapidly contrived a tourniquet. He rebandaged the wound, covered it loosely with the man's coat, and stood back.

"Who did it?" he questioned.

"The Dago."

"Where is he?"

"Away there."

Sampson leaned on the bunk edge, his eyes fixed still on the opposite tier, the dark and coffin-like shelves provided for men of the mercantile marine. By "there" he indicated the forward dinginess. The mate passed

thither and stooped to make an examination. The Dago remained inert, a shock-headed ruffian with a knife still clenched in one fist. Finch came back, and, standing over Sampson, said—

"Guess he's dead."

Sampson looked up, eyes bleared, face a chart of scratches.

"That's so," he admitted. "Yew see," he added, after a moment given to thought, "it was him or me—he's got his teeth set in me, an' so . . . waal—what would yew do—anyways?"

"Me?"

Finch paused to examine the flickering pulse. "I kal'kilate," he decided grimly, "I wouldn't hev waited fer teeth."

He pointed to the torn arm and turned on his heel.

"Git aaft the rest of yews!" he growled, his voice ringing anew. "Git aaft an' stand by to brail in the spanker—savvy?"

The men savvied. They preceded him in a body—three of the six who should have marched to muster.

For in the forward bunk, lying like the Dago upon his back in the shadows, was the thing which had groaned when Webster entered the pit to try coercion.

CHAPTER V.

LEE FORE-BRACE.

The men Shanghaied into the *Magician's* forecastle, sat round the mess kids, taking breakfast.

The kids contained a chunk of cold salt horse in one; the cook's idea, in concrete form, of cracker-hash in the other. The dishes lay there for all men to appraise, a sufficiently unappetising meal; the first for individuals

who had fought and starved for twenty-four hours by the clock. Weevily biscuits stood near at hand in a bread-barge. A pot of rancid butter. And on the bunk sides were hooked a row of shining pots holding a black draught, which steamed like a funeral pyre about the cockroach carcasses still floating in it.

The grimy beams and dirt-coated walls of the pit these men inhabited looked down upon them watching what they would do. A gale of wind sent tokens of its energy whistling to greet them. Great seas swished over rail and shook the pit's side. It boomed, vibrating, giving out the note of a monstrous drum.

Outside there was daylight, or what stood for it in that world of seething cloud and spindrift; but inside the pit the circle of light thrown by a flaring oil lamp was rigidly confined to a space measuring perhaps six feet in diameter. Beyond was gloom—the stagnant, steaming gloom of the pit unpolished for Authority's survey.

There were, of course, a skylight and some side ports, all extremely diminutive in size; but the skylight wore a tarpaulin jacket to shelter the bunks it lighted from the inroads of rain and sea; and the ports wore gags, or had their blinkers on, in the amiable desire of effecting a similar cure. A damp and chilly space stood out for all observers,—a space unwarmed but for the smoky oil lamp; a space unventilated but for the regal door crevices; a space reeking of foulness, and stained gloriously by a mixed blend of blood and filth.

Outside it, running the breadth of the two forecastles, was the alley-way, clothed in darkness and hung with swinging oilskins. The water gushed up and down its length with each recurring lurch—water foul and smelling like a drain. It spurted in twisting fountains each time the washboards dipped to scoop from the torrent roaring without. The ports squirted, gamely striving, despite the gags, to drench the bunks each time a sea climbed green to wash them.

The men sat there to watch. Their breakfast slithered

this way, that way, at the imperious ordering of each roll. The house groaned with the noise of a ship-yard; each plank and beam and bolt, each ramshackle butt and bend, each wire-edged angle-iron and strip of pine, sang its own individual note in strident disharmony. The clamour was immense, a thing of majesty—a thing to give those men pause who, after years of practice, had succeeded in fashioning so melodious a barn and making it float.

A whistle sounded far aft on the poop—a long piercing note.

The men crouched over their breakfast too sodden to respond. One gesticulated with his hand, waving a pipe which was out. Another looked up, saw the mess kid marching towards him, met it with his toe, and scored a goal beneath a distant bunk.

"To hell with the whole thing!" he growled.

And that was the verdict of them all, given almost without a move.

Again the whistle sounded.

A "Dutchman" rose and opened the lee door some few inches. He returned and sat down fingering his pannikin of coffee, or the stuff which stands for coffee in the British merchant service.

"Vind's drawin' ahead," he remarked.

"Let it drawr an' be damned," said a voice from the forward shadows. "Let it drawr an' pull ahead an' give us a chance to get back. Let it drawr an' blow like hell, an' make us up stick an' back to 'Frisco—that's wot I say, sons."

No one took up the challenge.

"Ain't we 'ungry?" the voice questioned again. "Ain't we all 'ad a good feed an' don't we feel good—eh?"

He drew back and struck a match; then for a moment the markings of a bruised face and swollen eyes stood out. The men beside and around him left the questions unanswered. They fidgeted as they sat.

"Yer skeard!" said the voice, but without astonishment. The man's pipe glowed an accompaniment to

his speech. "Yer 'fraid of one bloomin' driver. 'Fraid that's wot's the matter with Hannah."

No one answered.

"Skeard?" the voice reiterated with the upward lift of a sneer,—“an' of him!”

A Dutchman advanced it as his opinion that “it vos best to obey the mate. The mate vould not hit men vot obeyed,” he counselled.

The other sprang upon his words, making mince-meat of them.

“Hold yer stiffin' jaw—you're skeard. That's the ver-dick. Afraid! A lot of slaverin', pulin', horse-eatin' Kaisers . . . stand up an' own to it. Stand!”

Some one thumped on the iron of the door.

“Lee fore-brace! On deck all hands! Trim sail!”

The voice sounded plainly, preposterously dominant,—a twang about its phrasing, a hint at what would happen if that door did not open.

The man stood up. He flung his pipe into the bunk at his side. “Are ye goin' to back me?” he questioned. “Will yer stand up an' back me? I'll start in. I'll upset 'is bloomin' apple-cart. Cut me over the eyes, he did . . . see that,”—he pointed to his jagged brow; “cut me with 'is bloomin' dusters. Are we goin' to stand that—eh?”

He paused, head thrust out, waiting for adherents.

The Dutchmen filed past him going to the door. Their master had called for them. They knew it. Was not the gale, even, on the side of these who drove?

The man accepted the hint.

“Good,” he said. “Now we know w'ere we stand—an' if I 'elp any one after this, may Gawd fergive me fer a liar.”

Finch stood on a corner of the main hatch holding to the running gear when the men appeared. He stood there grim and in silence, his eyes set to catch malingerers.

“Tail on to them braces!” he snarled. “Smart's the word. Why in flames caan't yew keep yer ears skinned.”

The men advanced speechless.

"Yew're like a crowd of all-fired washerwomen," he commented, watching. "Get over an' tail on to them braces!"

The men moved across the deck without snap, intentionally careless of the orders which came; pondering sullenly on the fact that they were breakfastless.

"A man can't work wi'out grub," one cried out as they trudged.

The mate sampled the opinion and found it spurious.

"Tail on to them braces!" was his answer.

The men moved in silence. A sea rushed up, clamouring to windward; it topped the rail and fell thundering on board. The men crossed swiftly now, making for the spars, but the sea caught them and flung them spluttering in the scuppers. They sprawled there swearing.

A cold bath knocks all the fight out of some nations; it puts the devil in the hearts of others. The one takes it as a thing it expects; the other, as a thing maliciously invented to annoy. A Greek, Constantine, rose gesticulating and full of anger. His one suit was wet. Cold water had entered his boots. The icy beastliness trickled down his back and chest. He shouted, shaking a savage fist, at the elements—

"Anda la merida carrajo!" They always say *anda la merida carrajo*, then they spit and dance. Constantine spat. He was a small man.

"Phito-o-o!" he shouted. "Grandissima raga de——"

"Hold yer noise!" Finch admonished.

The Greek was beyond holding anything, much less his tongue.

"I, no!" he decided, spitting, angry. "I not speak-a you. I speak-a sea . . . wet mouch! Carrajo! No got uzzer . . ."

"Git on tew that brace!"

The mate crossed over, slouching in rubber boots which reached his middle. The Greek gesticulated, head forward, hands lifted in expostulation.

"I, no. I not have to eat—nada."

The man's fingers went round to the sheath hanging

from his belt. The mate loomed hugely above him. Finch saw the movement and halted giant-like, masterful, hand in pocket.

"Traega me este cuchillo!" he ordered concisely.

"I, no." The man shook his head. His cap fell off. "Yo tener por . . ."

The mate's arm swung round, and Constantine rolled in the deck-wash. He made no effort to rise. The water ran over him gurgling to reach the scupper he blocked. The mate stooped, took the knife from its sheath, and flung it over the rail.

He turned to the crew, who stood watching. "Haul, Bismarks!" he growled. "D'yew mind me? Haul!"

He twisted to catch the bo'sun's eye.

"Slack away there—slack away. And if," he remarked grimly, facing the men, "any of yew hev anything tew say after we've done with the yards—why, let him come right here an' say it—savvy?"

No one spoke.

The men were content, so it appeared, to trim sail, to acknowledge their master, and to do his bidding. They looked into the eye of the growing gale and decided that it would blow harder,—that there was no chance of that return for which some prayed.

CHAPTER VI

THE SHIPS MOVE ON.

Out of the grey mistiness the sun rose white and veiled to mark the birth of another day. It looked down upon twin grey blotches separated by miles of heaving water, but creeping boisterously southward, each with a milk-white tail comet-wise in her wake.

They were the two ships, the *Padrone* and *Magician*, following each other, and drawing together as inevit-

ably as two chips in a bath. They moved with one aim, each towards that point on the equator where Findlay predicts that a slant through the doldrums may be expected. On the same bee-line, of similar speed and shape and burden, it was certain that they would meet, pass and repass, provided no great force conspired to drive them apart.

So the sun looked down upon them and smiled. Twin grey blotches grew for a moment radiant upon a whirl of colour—blue, green, yellow; the tail boiled whiter, the sails stood out soft, luminous, exultant in that glorious break, then paling, returned once more to greyness.

Again nothing in sight for either lurching warehouse, again the grey seas charging under a grey dome; the swift and rather sullen plunge, the lifted, pleading side; again the descent into a trough preparing in the greyness, and the cold driven spray lashing the houses and decks with a touch of hail.

Nothing in sight for either of them. Only the grey dome stooping to meet the ring of waters which hemmed them.

But order stood on the decks of the *Padrone*, mutiny on the decks of her sister. Consideration on the one, brutality on the other—that was the essential difference, and out of it arose all that follows.

The last verse in the song echoing amidst the *Magician's* tall spars began quite tamely, but the chorus welled up in ragged energy and made no halt until the baton of the conductor fell. It happened in this wise.

Captain Fahlun walked the poop glaring into the mistiness, and at the wheel stood Nicola, subject of his Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Austria. Fahlun's mood matched the morning, Nicola's that of a rosy dawn. He steered wonderingly, cautiously, with a simper, perhaps of amazement, at his dexterity. He knew nothing of ships, but had endured a sorrowful journey from the fatherland to the States in a "schip" called by some one the *White Star*. After that had

come various buffetings, the gradual acquisition of some few words of English, and now this.

He questioned in a rather dull mind what it all meant, but was prepared to acquiesce in the fact that he was here, and at that moment the sun peeped out. Nicola expanded his chest and looked about him. Captain Fahlun, taken at a disadvantage without a sextant, dived into the pilot-house to find it, but by the time he again reached the poop the sun had vanished. Captain Fahlun acknowledged the fact in sentences which should have palsied the sun; then he marched sullenly aft.

Nicola still steered. Bland and frankly idiotic of countenance, he drew zigzags with the ship's keel, and the wake, lying white amidst the greyness, described his efforts faithfully. Fahlun halted near by, swearing now at an object which should have understood.

"Not so mouch hell-um," he advised gruffly. "You dake up too mouch room. Keep her sdraight!"

Nicola stared at the swinging compass card. He looked a trifle flustered, but made no remark. The ship yawed serenely.

"Hear vot I say—not so mouch hell-um. Pring her to—tam my eyes and puttons, pring her to!"

If he had spoken in the particular dialect which Nicola acknowledged as his own, it is conceivable that the man would have ventured some reply; but Captain Fahlun was a Swede, or a Dane, or a German who knew nothing of the language for which the Huns still fight, and was he not master of an English ship upon which, in justice to England, her language may be tortured?

But this man Nicola only smiled, his eyelids flickering.

Of course, too, it should be predicated that when an order is given, the person to whom it is addressed must have some knowledge of the evolution desired. Nicola had none. If Captain Fahlun had given his order in any language under the sun, Nicola would still have smiled. The man was a tram-driver, a

person who had learned, in San Francisco, to punch a gong, switch on and off a current, or apply the brakes. He had additionally some knowledge of the driving wheel of a motor, and found the concern with which he struggled set at a stupid angle. He had made some progress in the art under the mate's tuition—still the thing kicked and flustered him.

Captain Fahlun advanced, swearing thick gutturals, and reiterated his command.

"Put down ze veel—Holl'sch! Pring to ze schip . . . pring to!"

Nicola, nodding and very desirous of doing something, said—

"*'Ess*" and hove the wheel up.

"Down!" roared the skipper.

"*'Ess*," said Nicola.

"Down—Neider! Unter!"

Nicola let go the wheel. For one moment it appeared that he contemplated assuming the attitude of a car-driver, and would take a seat on the gratings; but the wheel span round, and in a second the man was caught and flung heavily to leeward.

Fahlun took his place, shouting angrily for assistance—"Vorwärts there! Vorwärts!" he yelled. "A handt to the veel—quick!"

The mate came slouching aft, and Philip of the after-guard relieved the skipper. He stood up, breathing heavily and pointing at Nicola, who lay half-stunned to leeward.

"Pick him up. Dake him away vrom this—down vorwärts! Anywhere. Up!" He approached, savagely shaking his fist. "Up! tam your eyes!"

Nicola glanced up, blinking, owl-like of visage.

"Up! Alzar! Auf—aufheben!" The skipper searched his memory for variants of the word, tried "Aller! Marcher!" fell back again on polyglot English. "If you not get up, I drice you up. Mind that!"

Nicola pricked his ears. Aufheben? Why, a moment ago this man was ordering him down; now he was ordering him up. Nicola had but little inclination to

do either. He gazed rather stupidly, first at his commander, then at the mate. He seemed dazed. His eyes rolled up bloodshot.

But Fahlun was not dazed. He reached the prostrate man and kicked him savagely in the ribs. "Up!" he shouted. The mate half lifted him from the deck, found him inert, and joined hands with the skipper. The pair kicked scientifically, then danced on Nicola, and in a trice the man was stunned in all verity.

The skipper leaned over him, reiterating his menace. "If you not get up, I drice you up—hein?"

Nicola obviously was past getting up, or getting anywhere. Philip, struggling with the wheel, cried out, "It's a damned shame! If this goes on I'll——"

The mate lurched over to windward. "Shut your blame teeth!" he advised, "or I'll . . ." The menace appealed. Philip stood mute, struggling with the wheel. He grew red in the face. He passed one hand swiftly across his eyes, and again stared at the compass, a thing swimming mistily before him.

"Yew've got tew much darned slack at the back of your tongue. Stow it!" the mate advised, suggestive of attitude.

He returned to the skipper's side.

"We'd best get him down out of this," he decided. "He's stunned."

"Sdunned be tamned! He only sham."

Nevertheless, on investigation the mate's theory proved correct, so the pair stooped over him and dragged him to the pilot-house—the chart-room of all British vessels. In the upper deck beams was a shackle. In a locker near at hand a piece of ratline stuff. The skipper produced it, tied it round the man's wrists, and hoisted him.

"Stand up!" he growled. "Other dime when I say stand up, you vill know vot you moust do. Stand!" He kicked the pendulous form and slammed the door upon it.

The mate acquiesced. They reached the deck together. Outside was a passing gleam of sun. Outside one

might watch the ship driving through a halo of spume, heading for that cape which must be rounded before the grain which was below could come to the people who clamoured for it. Outside it might possibly be advisable to read a lesson to that after-guard with "too much darned slack at the back of his tongue."

But in Fahlun's brain there revolved an opinion set in precise terms. "Of myself I will take her home—or I will eat her."

Crew! Officers!

He snapped fingers at the notion. The essential thing is a commander who knows his mind.

CHAPTER VII

THE BOY—PHILIP.

For two hours Nicola swung, supported by that piece of ratline stuff, and the warehouse groaned and shivered, butting headlong at the seas.

A man who is "triced up," as the phrase goes, rests neither wholly on his hands nor on his feet. He is suspended midway between the two if the punishment has been carefully adjusted. He is neither free to stand nor free to swing, but is subject to a series of jerks and strains which are usually effective in producing coma. It is a nice torture when scientifically planned. It is on a par with the dripping-water punishment as adopted by that herd of zealots known as the Inquisitors; perhaps it has come down from them, but applied discreetly it leaves no mark.

If you wish to add to the indignity, you may strip your victim and leave him where rats abound; but Fahlun was a humane person, who had withal some rudimentary gleamings of intelligence. So he placed Nicola within the chart-room doors and left him to

bob and swoon in comparative comfort until ten o'clock. At that hour Philip, relieved from the wheel, passed hot-foot to the half-deck.

But what happened between that time and seven bells Fahlun never quite understood. The mate was below,—turned in,—Fahlun taking duty and planning fresh degradation for that *verflucht* skipper, Collins, whom, by hook or by crook, he intended to beat.

He passed up and down the poop surveying the conditions.

The wind favoured him. He glanced at the towering array of canvas humming under the clouds. He stared overside and saw the milk-white path trending far astern, winding out there where the seas charged, dying when they passed. He stared into the heart of the gale and decided that again the wind was drawing aft,—that it would be necessary to trim sail to raise the weather clews. And having decided the point, he came to the break of the poop and blew his whistle—one long blast.

This should have brought the bo'sun, but it brought no one. Again he whistled, and supplemented the call by bellowing for the watch.

"Lay aft the wadtch—lay aft! Square the yard."

Still no reply. Still no sign of the crew. A main deck awash with the seas which flooded them; capstan standing up in it, fife rails—all white, smothered in spume. Doors of all houses rigorously closed. Nothing else.

Fahlun, swearing angrily, whistled again, and turned, stamping aft. He glanced at the man at the wheel, ordered him to keep a straight course, and again stamped forward.

No watch, no bo'sun, decks charged with brine—nothing else—and a sound that was new.

He came to the cabin skylight and lifted a section. "Steward!" he cried out.

No answer; only the sound, dulled and shut off by the bulkheads and the groans or cries, presumably of that triced-up fool who had angered him.

Fahlun withdrew from the skylight and stared into the binnacle. The ship moved heavily, dead on her course.

He looked up from the card and a word fell—"Schwein!" but whether he addressed the helmsman or the crew who chose this moment to harass him is uncertain, and needs no close investigation. For it was at this moment that Treланick, the west-country carpenter, appeared at the head of the poop ladder.

"Drim sail!" Fahlun roared, approaching. "Call ze handts! Vot in hell mean yous—hey?"

Treланick, with Philip close at his heels, the short Bristolian sail-maker, the steward, and cook, and the three "young gentlemen" accompanying him, made no sort of sign that he wished to evade the issue. The men marched in a gang, close set, upon this skipper who had decided to run his ship on coercive principles, to run her home single-handed if necessary, or to eat her.

Philip and his friends had no quarrel with the scheme here enunciated. On the whole, they would have preferred to see Captain Fahlun commence feeding at once; indeed they were prepared to waive the point, even to argue,—but this business of bully-ragging was apparently to be applied to them equally with the men. It was bad enough to be damned without stint and seriatim, but to be damned collectively in the presence of witnesses set them on edge.

They came up the ladder at a bound and stood panting before the Dutchman.

"To hell yourself—what d'you mean?" cried one. And in answer to the stare Treланick took up his parable and declaimed—

"We'm here to know what sort of devil's work you'm after, cap'n. We'm here an' we want an answer. You've got your mate murdered; you've got two or three, maybe half a dozen, of your hands shot or in irons; and you've set on a man, you and that forsaken blue-nose between you, and have knocked the stuffin' out of her. We want to know what sort of a game you think you're playing; . . . whether you think . . ."

"Vether I think or vether I think not to you is nutting," the skipper interrupted, scowling and fumbling for his call. "Get you to your vorks!"

"Work be sheered. I'll do no more," Trelanick decided.

"Nor I, nor I," echoed his friends, "devil the hand-stir!"

"Soh!" said the skipper heavily.

"So," said Trelanick, with an attempt at mimicry laughable to remember.

Fahlun found his call, put it to his lips, and blew.

"Might just as well 'old yer breff," said the sail-maker. "Think we're a bloomin' set o' cuckoos?"

The skipper eyed the group irresolutely, uncertain as yet of their meaning. He swayed to the lurches, shaggy, unkempt, nursing his sextant and waiting for the sun.

"Aren't we short-anded enough as it is?" the sail-maker questioned pertinently. "Wot's the good o' this kind o' game? Think you're in a bloomin' Yank—goin' to bamboozle all 'ands and fight all 'ands? Think there'll be nothin' 'eard of this w'en we get 'ome—if we ever do get 'ome?"

"Gawd lumme! I've known a better man than you put in irons by 'is crew, *an'* carried 'ome by 'is crew, *an'* chucked into jail by 'is crew before this—an' that's wot'll 'appen to you unless you like to go about an' start in on a new tack."

"Tack?" said the Dutchman softly. "Vot tack?"

"The quiet tack—the tack a man sails w'en 'ee's dealin' wiv men."

"Soh?" said the skipper again.

"Men you're goin' to feed diff'rent from wot you've started," the sail-maker asserted, head thrust forward, earnest of tone.

"Soh?"

"If you think about goin' 'ome free," the sail-maker threw out as addenda.

Fahlun eyed these men. He was unarmed and alone, which proves he was a novice at coercion. For the

moment his wits failed him. He turned to look at the sails humming high in the greyness—a fact which gave him away entirely. A man who runs his ship on coercive principles never flinches, never hesitates, never loses the trend. When in doubt he kicks. Failing this possibility he shoots.

“Where’s that man you’ve done for? Let her out,” Trelandick apostrophied, noting the pause.

“I let you out,” the skipper retorted, edging towards the rails. “I let you out—mit a hook!” he sneered, snatching a belaying-pin. “Now! I fight you! Come on!”

Coercion! Pish! As a strategist the man was a fool.

The cook rushed in to seize his wrist, but the Dutchman was too quick for him: a blow fell, and in a second the darkey was down.

A sailor of any other nation would have retired from the contest at this, perhaps permanently, but the head of George Washington, chanty-men, and grub-spoiler in the mercantile marine had stood heavier punishment than Fahlun administered and come up smiling. In a trice the man was on his feet shouting his derision—

“Strike me, hey? Golly I teach you strike this sinnah! Strike me, hey? By the good Lord I teach you how to strike—now, right heah!”

He pulled off his coat and turned up his sleeves, revealing arms, black and polished as ebony, on which the muscles writhed and twisted with every movement of his hands.

Fahlun stepped back, flourishing the heavy iron, grim of aspect, ready, as it appeared, to add to the disorder by a further appeal to force; ready indeed to commit any crime rather than acknowledge himself beaten. Men so forgetful of what is due to a commander must be taught. To teach on board ship may be construed as to knock down. To get in the first blow, and to be sure that it is not a boy sent on a man’s errand. That is what Fahlun had not learned—the science of hitting.

So he stepped back, watching, and alert at length

to smash. The quarry refused to be drawn. He, too moved circumspectly, watching.

"Come on!" cried the Dutchman, pausing, intent. "I log you vor this. I log you all—but first I break yours. Come on!"

At that moment a hasty footstep was heard on the ladder, and a fresh young voice cried out—

"Put back that pin, cap'n. If you attempt to strike either of us I shall shoot."

Fahlun glanced up.

"Devine!" he growled. Then after a pause, "This is mutiny, hein?"

Philip made no response. He stood a little apart from the rest, covering his commander with the revolver he had fetched, steady, cold, his glance unwavering.

"You onderstand vot this means, hey? Mutiny on the high zeas?"

Fahlun asked the question as one who would have the thing set out under its proper label, and he acknowledged the fact that no answer came; only that the small bore of an army revolver, moving steadily nearer, looked him in the eye, and that the hand holding it did not flinch. He recognised that for the moment he was helpless, and the belaying-pin clattered on the deck at his feet.

"Holl'sch!" he growled. "You haff me. Vell—vot now?"

Philip found voice at this. He tossed a pair of handcuffs towards the carpenter. "Irons there, Chips!" he cried. "Doctor, get hold of him."

The cook stepped up grinning. He saluted Fahlun and pinioned his arms, "Beg pardon, Cap'n Fahlun," he remarked. "Guess you h'd bettah stand quiet."

Fahlun grunted—"Irons, hey?" then after a pause, "Vell, go on."

The handcuffs clicked on his wrists. He made no effort to avoid them. He stood shaggy and unkempt, staring dull-eyed at the men who had accomplished this thing, then listened to the voice which addressed him—

"Captain Fahlun," said Philip, "you are ironed by my orders because you are dangerous loose. I don't know whether you are drunk or mad—but I saw you strike that poor devil at the wheel.

"I want you to understand that we have considered this matter together—Chips, Sails, the bo'sun, cook, and steward. We are the after-guard. When the skipper goes mad it is our duty to act.

"Well. We have acted. The mate is in irons also, and I have been elected captain in your place. If you will go to your cabin and stay there without fuss, I shall leave you free—but if you attempt any tricks, you or the mate, I shall leg-iron the pair of you, and keep you under guard. Will you give me your word?"

Fahlun, staring at the still young figure confronting him, lost control.

"I giff you hell!" he shouted, struggling violently with his captors. "You wait till I come home. Then I tell you vot I giff." He rolled with the pair who held him upon the deck, swearing thickly, and twisting for freedom.

"Leg-irons there, Larry—quick!" said Philip. "Stand back there, cook; Sails, let the beast go—I can hold him."

The men sprang away, and Philip confronted him with the revolver.

"Mind—I shall use it," came swiftly as a reminder.

Fahlun sat up. He rose slowly from the deck, and stood there panting and torn from the swift fight. He cast his eyes forward, and saw Larry advancing with fresh manacles, and decided at once what he must do.

He moved a trifle grimly towards Philip, acknowledging the position.

"Goodt," he said. "You haff me. I giff my word."

The bo'sun stepped up dangling the irons. "You'll not trust him, sir?" he questioned briefly.

But Philip put him aside.

"Yes," he decided. "A man's word is sacred. I stand by that. You'll go to your cabin, sir."

"Now?"

"At once, if you please."

"Goodt."

Captain Fahlun turned on his heel and passed down the companion to his room.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE END OF THE LESSON.

Nicola, subject of his Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Austria, still bobbed on his gibbet, threatening the chart-room doors.

Lurch to starboard—

Extension motion! First practice! Nicola obedient, stomach thrust out, hands up, scraping toes on the deck.

Lurch to port—

As you were! Nicola gravely recurving, heels on the deck, butting at the door with his haunches—a picture for those who would learn.

His tongue was out, a black lump amidst the foam on his lips. His head bobbed inanely, sideways, backways, front. And above were Nicola's two hands, swollen and purple over the lashing; veins black and knotted, nails of a bluish tinge, impinging upon coagulation. The man's face was white, his teeth set. Great drops of sweat stood on his brow and trickled down the torn shirt to his chest. Blood was upon him—blood dry and cracked.

Skin gleaming, white, apparently drained; eyes glazed—so Nicola swung at the edge of the land of shadows. And the warehouse which held him hummed with the voice of the wind which drove her.

Outside, men jarred and fought for supremacy. Inside, a black tongue registered the fact that release was imperative. Outside, a gale raved over the envious sea and struck fine harmonies on the ship's taut wire.

Inside, one of the grain carriers, attitudinising like a puppet, learned something of the new life upon which he was entered.

The wrangle ceased with the exit of Captain Fahlun, and a victorious after-guard came hurriedly to the chart-room door. They unlocked it, flung it wide—then in a moment, as it seemed, a crowd of men descended upon Nicola and he lay on the deck at their feet. Toe and heel, heel and toe, he had scraped that deck for hours; now he lay upon it, men stooping over him.

Knives gleamed—that was the prevailing note; words were thrust aside, and only the knives had point. They moved slowly about the coagulating hands, ripping the bands piecemeal, cautiously touching the strands. Then suddenly water appeared. A sip of something stronger made way between the clenched teeth, and Nicola, come back from the land of shadows, was ready for sleep.

A flicker passed the drawn lids, a word escaped—nothing more; but Nicola was ready for sleep, and Treelanick gave voice to the general easiness.

“Pick her up, boys, an’ carry her for’ud—she’m in for more days than dollars, I’ll go bail.”

So they picked her up and carried her forward, and placed her in her own little pew in the pit, and Nicola sighed his content.

It mattered nothing to Nicola that the pit was dark, nearly as dark as the land he had seen; it was nothing to Nicola that the deck over his pew sent showers upon him as he lay; it was nothing to Nicola that the bread was musty, the beef horse, the pork rancid—for had not Nicola escaped conscription in the land of his fathers and come to earn his bread in the land of the dollars? and was not this an episode on the path, merely an experience from which he would presently awake with more dollars to cram into that skin trunk of his he had brought from the land of the Huns? and was not the bread and the beef and the pork as nourishing as that upon which he had grown to manhood?

Nicola simpered in his pew, lying on the straw bed

found him by a crimp who was also something of a philanthropist. It was eminently comfortable again to be in bed. So Nicola simpered as he lay there nursing his torn wrists.

Mankind adapts himself to his environment. He becomes brutish in the presence of brutes, foolish in the presence of fools, quite as inevitably as he becomes cold in the presence of ice, or hot before a furnace. It is a law which accounts for much that is strange in the conduct of men of the sea—but Nicola had not learned it. So he lay in his pew nursing his hurts and content to aim at sleep.

Stupid Nicola. Big, heavy, dull, blundering, asinine Nicola. It would have been better for Nicola if he had never left the land of shadows upon which for a moment he had peeped.

He had so much to learn—as a grain carrier.

Stupid Nicola.

CHAPTER IX.

“COME ON!”

It is not easy on board ship to keep a man prisoner. There are moments when it is necessary to unlock the handcuffs and give him freedom, and—this is the essential difficulty—there is at these times no walled court wherein he may move. He is free to all intents, as are other men, unless a guard is always present, and, what is more to the point, always alert.

This was the difficulty which forced itself upon Philip Devine and his comrades as they paused there questioning how they should move.

The Pacific, north and south, fronted them; an endless expanse of water, studded with dangers, pricked with hazard. Could they navigate, could they compel obedi-

ence, could they be sure of the skipper and mate and that jumbled crowd of foreigners whom they had called from the pit?

The after-guard held conference on the question, standing on the break of the poop and staring at the vast distances as evidenced by the charts in Philip's keeping.

Could they navigate?

Well, here at all events evidence stood solid. Philip was a Brocklebank scholar of the *Conway*, and could navigate old Failings into a cocked-hat. He had kept the ship's reckoning on the passage out, at the dead mate's bidding, and the after-guard knew what they knew on this head. "Besides," and this was Philip's view stated baldly, "if a chap gets adrift, there will be ships and things to ask. We aren't the only packet homeward bound with grain round the Horn. We shall see some of them—that's a certainty—and can keep in touch with them if we want to."

Again, and this was the clinching argument, "isn't the *Padrone* somewhere just ahead of us, and won't Cap'n Collins give us a hand when he knows?"

The conference decided this was so; but they walked so gingerly under the load of their new responsibilities, that Philip grew impatient and cried out, "Oh, I vote we trust something to luck"; and the men, as though this was a new force which by some means had been overlooked, decided to accept its aid, and passed the question of navigation *nem. con.*

The next item on the agenda related to the difficulty of compelling obedience from the crew.

At this there was a little move of decision. Trelanick bristled at the notion of insubordination,—“Her'd like,” he said definitely, “to see the chap, or chaps for that matter, as intended any game.”

Sails, dropping aspirates as dust and dross, “’oped ’ee knew a cove w’en ’ee seed ’im, or a crowd o’ coves, or a bloomin’ regiment. If you ast me my opinion, I’d stake me last dollar on the virtuosity of the coves in the pit. ’Andle ’em right, an’ they’ll be right. ’Andle ’em wrong, an’ you’ll get ’em wrong. That’s wot’s the matter wiv

'Annah! Trot 'em out if you don't believe wot I say. Trot 'em out *now*."

"I vote we pass that," said Philip.

"Done," said the bo'sun, in the tones of an undertaker. "Will I fetch 'em?"

"Yes," said Philip.

Freddy, Larry, the cook, and steward having accepted their share in this risk without comment, the bo'sun moved to the rail and yelled for "All 'ands!"

The men who had already taken part in the programme, and were now sheltering beneath the break of the poop, climbed the lee ladder and advanced to a position assigned them by the bo'sun. A motley crowd. A crowd wearing bruises and bandages in about equal proportion. They looked at Philip, at the head now of the after-guard, and shuffled with their feet, uncertain of what came.

Philip, standing near the capstan, and wearing the hard-weather kit of the Mersey cadet ship, made no pause. He plunged at once into the middle of things with a phrase—

"I want to know," he questioned, "whether you are going to back me? The mate and the cap'n are in irons, and I have proposed to run the ship home."

"'Ome—w'ere's that?" asked Cockney, the man of the lower plane.

"A place that never held you, my son," Philip retorted, and a laugh registered the fact that he had scored. Cockney glowered in silence.

"Of course you must know that I can navigate," Philip proceeded unabashed. "I learnt that on the *Conway*, and I've practised here. But before we decide I want to know whether we can reckon on you men helping me.

"So far," he went on, "I admit you have done all I asked. But there is a big difference between helping me to collar the mate and skipper and working the ship home."

"There is," said Cockney, "a bloomin' big difference. W'y not get back to 'Frisco? I didn't want to leave

'Frisco. Never 'ad nothin' to s'y about leavin' 'Frisco—then w'y not get back?"

"Because we are nearly a thousand miles from 'Frisco, and there's a head wind back," Philip wailed. "Come on! Oh, come on!"

"Well—there's other ports to lou'ard of us—or will be. There's Panama—and there's Callao."

"Nice you'd look in Panama, or Callao either," said Philip. "You are a mutineer, my son, just as I would be in any port out of England."

"And w'y not England?"

"Because we shall get fair play there, and here . . . oh, you know very well what you would get directly the cap'n of the port's boat came alongside. Calaboose—that's what it would mean."

"Sime in England—if I know anythin'," Cockney decided, grumbling. "Look at it, mister. Wot's to keep us out of chokee in England that won't keep us out in Callao?"

"Straight men, my son. Ten dollars from this Dutch skipper of ours and a case of champagne would work the oracle at any of these fandangoing ports. But try ten dollars on an English judge. Come, you know something. You have seen a bit of life in your time—eh?"

"I'av," said Cockney. "Seems to me," he added parenthetically, "I'm doin' all the bloomin' talkin'. Oo's next?"

"Right—then you agree to help me?"

"Oh, as fur that,—w'y, if the other chaps is on I'm on."

"No—that won't do," Philip decided. "I want to have it out now. I shall want every pound you have to give. We are short-handed,—there will be no stint as to grub—I'll see to that,—and it will be calashee watch right home; but I'm only going to take her there with your consent and your help."

Philip squared his shoulders, looking about him. He decided to go farther, and to take the men into his confidence.

"It means this difference, too, in England. We don't allow drunken skippers to sail our ships, and we don't allow revolvers. We are pretty bad, but not generally so low down as that. Oh, come on! You stand by me. My father is an underwriter with a big interest in this ship. If we go wrong he stands to lose heavily. He and those who are with him know what it means to get a ship like this home short-handed—see? If there is no loss I think I can promise you won't come out wrong side up. Oh, come on . . . What are you going to do?"

Cockney looked up with a new alacrity; he smiled at the chanted prayer.

"Underwriter?" he questioned. "That's a bloke as insures a ship, ain't it, sir?"

"Ship and cargo."

"Right-o! Dot me down, sir. I'm on."

"Good! Now the rest of you. Pass over to port those who decide for home. What do you say there—you with the checker-board shirt?"

The man did not comprehend the allusion, nor, until a laugh went up, did he understand that he was the individual at whom they pointed. A garment of flaming colour, loud in design, covered the shoulders of Constantine, the Greek, who had held parley with the mate, and still showed signs of it about the eyes.

The man shrugged the checker-board to his ears, extending his hands.

"I no savvy," he decided.

He shook his head resolutely, and his curls quaked. The thing was incomprehensible to him.

"Where you wantee go?" Philip questioned; "Anglaterra or San Francisco—eh?"

"Anglaterra? I no savvy."

"Cardiff—chump 'ed—Cardiff!" the Cockney trumpeted.

"Ah—Cardeef! Zat good place. Place haff got plenty too mouch gell."

He grinned there on the wind-swept deck, his knowledge of Anglaterra at length brought home to him.

"Pass him," said Philip. "Go over to port with the others. Oh, hang! Pasar a babor . . . avec les autres!"

The man grinned. "Bort side, capitan?" he questioned. "O-yes, I savvy me. I speak-a Engleesh, me. Bime-by I get ticket for speak-a Engleesh. Why you no speak-a all-a same I speak-a?"

"One of our new sailors!" Philip laughed, "eh, Chips? Come on! Good—I'll try in future. Over you go. Come on next—starboard or port, which is it to be?"

The men crossed until they were pretty solid for home, and the waverers agreed to cast in their lot with the rest. Even Yank, the big American, who stood with wounded arm among them, decided it was the square thing to do, and accepted the new sovereignty without fuss.

Then came the final and more insidious question—

Could they trust the cap'n and mate?

The conference became earnest here, the crew spectators. The leaders spoke for and against rigid confinement, and decided in the end that the suggestion was impossible.

"It would mean absolute safety," Philip acknowledged, "but it won't do. A man must be free sometimes, or we shall have the lawyers on us. We must give him exercise. He must eat—and so we'll just have to arrange to guard the pair of them."

"One or t'other of us always wiv a gun on us," the bo'sun suggested, nodding at the inevitable. "That's so. I'm there."

"Gun or no gun we've got to be there," Philip emphasised. "Oh, it's simple. I vote we pass that."

And here, to all intents, the matter ended.

They stood in a group on the fore side of the chart-room, with the fife-rail and bucket-rack and jigger-mast for a background, Philip facing them and arming his charts.

They were confronted by the Pacific oceans, north and south; by Cape Horn and the long crawl home. They were short-handed, overladen—handicapped by decisions made far away in the Council Chambers of

that home they desired. The *Magician*, a ponderous tank in the warehouse line, heading now to the south and crammed to the deck with grain, was the bridge which should carry them there. They were captainless, torn with battle—Philip stood there ready to lead them, reiterating his chant.

His talks with Collins had borne fruit. He saw with a new and clearer vision. Ships are what men make them. If they smash crews it is because man builds them to smash. If the sea swallows them it is because man has clipped them of power to withstand the sea's onslaughts.

There was nothing consciously heroic in his bearing. He was just keenly and vividly alive—a youth with dark eyes and curly hair; a youth burning for deeds. He desired, perhaps, a vision of that fair girl who moved before him, through the same dangers, over the same seas—and dreamed of "coming up with her." He desired, perhaps, again to see England.

Young, ignorant, new to the joys of command, he smiled at the suggestion on the lips of the sailmaker. "An' wot about this batty o' stuff we're carryin'—wot about lightenin' 'er? She's ter'ble wet."

"Lighten her—now?" Philip stood for a moment at pause. "Oh, hang! Isn't she Charley Filcher's bathing-machine?"

"Aye—so I've 'eared."

"I'd like to see her bathin' in her," Trelanick protested, referring darkly to Filcher.

"Oh, well—" Philip caught the trend. "Tell you what. If we find the old girl has bitten off more than she can chew, we'll jettison. . . . No—not when we are down there, but before."

There, apparently stood for the Horn, that ragged crag set threateningly at the foot of the world to bar their progress north and to make them fight.

Sails assimilated the news, his jaws working like the jaws of a cow, ruminant and chewing the cud.

The thing was nearly done with when Trelanick, still grave in face of the new responsibilities, threw out a

suggestion, faint-heartedly, almost casually—"an' if we come across gales—as of course we shall, we mustn't be forgettin' that we'm short-handed . . . we must——"

"Forget it?" Philip laughed. "She won't let us forget it. Trust her for that.

"No—you mustn't think I want to make light of the difficulties. I shan't forget them—nor will any of us. But we're going to meet them, and best them, and get the old barn round the Horn as soon as the *Padrone*, if I know anything of you.

"She's not going to beat us, is she—nor the German that crowed at us in 'Frisco bay—nor any of them, just because our skipper's a beast and we've had to ring him? I guess we're going to drive her home or drive her under. Come on! I'm for fighting it out. Those who don't agree hold up their hands. Come on! Oh, hang! come on."

Not a fist in evidence, but a crowd of men looking stealthily one at the other—looking and smiling.

"None," Philip commented. "Good. Well—those who are for Callao or Panama hold up *their* hands!"

Again a fistless, wind-blown company—a company remarking, in various dialects, that the meeting was unanimous.

"None. Good!" once more the ringing comment then in school-boy diction—"Now we're going to stick it. No larks, mind. And it will be calashee watch from this out. One hand on guard in the alley-way. And now we'll just pipe down and turn out the lazarette. We'll see if there's anything there to eat—for on my jimmy I'm peckish."

The *Magician* ambled sidelong at a sea and flooded the decks at their feet.

Peckish!

And these were the folk who had seen murder done; who had put away the dead; who had risen against their commander; and who now coldly decided "to drive her home or drive her under."

The bathing-machine drummed there in the greyness, her nose in air.

CHAPTER X.

"SHIPS THAT PASS."

Night in the tropics. A small moon vanishing down there over a silver pathway in the blue, scintillating to the big ship's rail. Night and silence. The silence of the vast Pacific lazily rolling beneath the dome.

The lesser stars were dead, but the cross with its sentinels leaned out to watch the tiny atoms moving under it.

The ships drew towards the Equator; languidly pulsing to the breath of faint trades. Great drops of dew stood bead-like on rail and paintwork. The ghostly houses gleamed in chilly silence, white as the snows which soon would clothe them. Sails asleep, dark with moisture; rigging asleep, outlined in white, a network of gossamer texture.

And under it all marched the watch—one forward, one on the poop—automatons obedient to destiny.

The man standing silent at the wheel, steered as though he feared to wake some restless sleeper—a spoke or two this way, a spoke or two that. He leaned upon the wheel staring at a compass upon which a trance had fallen—his attitude that of a man who dreams he sees a vision.

At intervals the bell sounded—one, two, three, four—six, and at similar intervals there arose the voice of a man, far in the shadows under the foresail, pointing to the fact that he, at all events, lived.

"Lights bright an' all's well!" he chanted. "Lights bright an' all's well!" A song like a dirge that might also be a prayer.

A sleeping ship. A slumberous ocean. A solitary guard set over that door in the alley-way whereon was lettered in brass the legend denoting authority—

CHIEF MATE.

A guard sunk upon his haunches on the alley-way mat, a guard in thrall to the night, nodding over his "gun"—the implement by which hitherto he had maintained control. But now there stood an open door—a concession accorded by a captain relying on the sanctity of man's word; and behind it, lounging on his sofa, was the mate, eyeing the proximity of that gun.

That was the position when six bells clanged overhead and the guard remained inert. It was the position, too, when the mate sat up and stretched, yawning in a way that pointed the test—and found it his. It was the position as the mate, still with eyes alert, twisted the cuffs he wore and snapped the chain. It was the position when in the moments that followed the mate stood up, and approaching the door stood barefoot regarding the gun and the guard who held it. He moved close and stooped to obtain exact information. And having found it, lifted erect with a word framed on lips which uttered no sound.

"Constantine!"

That was the fact he had gleaned—and that was all.

In the silence that stood over this pair other sentiments appeared. The mate's eyes registered them; they gave forth the fact that he remembered—also that the hazard bit deep.

Constantine!

The man with the checker-board shirt, the Greek who would presently hold Authority's pledge that he could speak the mother-tongue of Authority, the man whom Finch had cut over the eyes with the "dusters."

And he nodded in the presence of his enemy—nursing his "gun," one hand in the folds of his shirt. So it appeared.

Finch drew back, assimilating the facts registered there in his brain.

The alley-way was in darkness but for the moonlight streaming white across the gratings lying without, and the mate had no matches. Lights were taboo by this afterguard who assumed control—so also were matches. A stripped room testified these facts. Finch pondered

on these details. They stood rather in the way of the plan which he had formed, and part of which already he had accomplished. A corrosive sublimate found by the skipper had worked the miracle by which he was free. The skipper awaited him. Only the ignorance of a drowsy guard who remained perhaps too palpably drowsy stood between him and the gun.

Finch assumed the attitude of one asleep on the couch, hands together, eyes half shut. He coughed.

The moonlight showed him a guard suddenly startled in his sleep—a guard gripping his weapon, muttering strange words; then, again, it showed him the same guard falling back under the heavy stupor of the night, muscles relaxing, eyes closed, head inert.

Again Finch rose and moved stealthily upon this man. He stood over him—a lithe creature, muscular, accustomed to pounce and destroy; and in a second Constantine's wrist was in grip and the gun half wrenched from his hold.

A second—no more. Half wrenched—nothing more at that time. Then two swift strokes, crooked, upward strokes from Constantine's unfettered hand. A shifting grip, a whispered "Peste!" and the guard flung back, with Finch confronting him.

Finch armed with his "gun."

The deck, lying white in the moonlight, grew suddenly dark, in patches, where he stood. The shirt with which he was clad oozed crimson.

No word passed. Finch, breathing heavily, held the gun outstretched, pointing. The Greek, cowering before him, fenced with a knife no longer bright.

The mate advanced. "Git out!" was the order registered in eyes which had no need of speech. And Constantine crossed the sill, backwards, shouting—Finch at his heels.

Together they flashed through the moonlight, waking the sleepers—the mate's passage dark behind him; the Greek, white in advance. Ten seconds—they had passed the fife-rail, the engine-room, and come to the ladder by which men ascend to the forecastle.

Up!

The revolver approached, pointed, inexorable. It touched Constantine in the small of the back, and he screamed. But he mounted unhurt. He missed a step and paused swearing, with a leg idiotically pushed through the rungs. He glanced back, eyes registering fear, black curls flying.

Up!

The revolver made no sign—only it waited there, pointing at the foot of the ladder. The man recovered his balance and swept on. He reached the knight heads; a man who can fly no farther, a man at bay, grinning, his lips drawn back, his knife raised.

"Maldito!" He swore softly, watching, alternately shouting.

"Keep yer prayers," the mate advised him. Then, with a sarcastic inflection, "Guess that's in-com-prehensible tew yew. Andar hombre! Pasar a lo botalón!"

"Señor!"

"Pasar! Vamose! Pronto!"

Constantine obeyed. He leaped upon the foot-rope and swarmed to the boom end—the short, iron, up-sticking figment worn by all warehouses in these days. He lay down upon the steel, cowered upon it screaming.

The "gun" followed his movements, unfaltering.

A sound brought Finch round. He stared across the deck and saw that men were approaching. The look-out, dazed by the sudden flash of pursuer and pursued, was rallying now, and had found a capstan bar. He lurched there flourishing it, waiting for his comrades.

Finch swayed at his post. He reached up and gripped with one hand the stay above him. He faced his enemy, cringing on the boom.

"Yo pasar tambien!" he chanted huskily. "Vamose!"

Ping!

A shot rang out, and Constantine, curled suddenly into a ball, fell from the boom. He descended, spread out, and splashed on the sea like a starfish.

The mate marked his collapse.

"Uno momento . . . no mas!" he waved him cheerily.
"Uno momento compadre . . . no mas!"

The gun slipped from his fingers. He sat down with a quick lurch and leaned against the rail. He stared at the surrounding mob of men. The deck grew crimson about him. He pushed out his hand, dabbling with his fingers in the blood.

"Guess that—lets . . . me out," he whispered, head thrown back, eyes glazing—"eh, . . . old son?"

And the cross with its still sentries looked down upon a man whose fingers suddenly crooked as he scraped there at the dark stain upon the deck.

PHASE THE THIRD.—THE PRICE OF THE GRAIN.

CHAPTER I.

THE MEETING-PLACE.

IN our northern summer the belt of calms lying between the north-east and south-east trades moves to the north; the south-east trades blow home to the Equator, and the north-east die perhaps five or six degrees north of it. This space is called the doldrums, which sounds humorous, but is only tragedy in a changed dress for those who dare the sea in a modern windjammer.

A ship may cross the doldrums where her skipper chooses—there are only calms and fragmentary gales, called squalls, to hinder her. Sometimes this belt of calms and botherments is wide, sometimes narrow, but Captain Collins, in common with many others, believed that in the 127th meridian a ship would stand a better chance of speedy exit than if she were nearer the giant range, which faces the Pacific from the Arctic to Cape Horn.

Philip had learned to trust Captain Collins during those days when he had learned to love Nita, and he decided as soon as the question arose to cross as near the 127th meridian as fate would permit.

Now the *Magician*, on her eleventh day out, approached one of the meeting-places of ships, the region of dying trades. A little battered, a trifle more rusty, with fewer hands than when she passed the Golden Gate, she slammed through her first night's experience alone and without touching a rope-yarn as the saying

has it. But the twelfth day dawned and slowly unfolded its burden; no wind stirred, the sea was of oil, the sky a vault of blended colour, the air hot and vaporous. Out of the dying swell drove shoals of flying-fish, sun-warmed, iridescent; and upon it, floating buoyantly, sails spread to catch the air, came the nautilus, seeking the atoms upon which it lives.

A period of rains and squalls and tantalising calms had fallen upon the bathing-machine, and she sauntered nonchalantly through whatever chanced, her deck seams oozing pitch, her crew past swearing. Rain had soused her during the night, but now the sun shone, and the steam from her sails and decks stole heavenward like the steam from a kiln.

The great ship had flapped her way perhaps forty miles during the last twenty-four hours, and the palms of those who hauled her braces were stiff and hard as the ropes they handled.

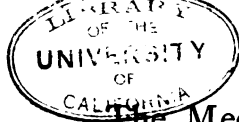
All ropes are hard and kinky when they are wet. In these days of cheapness they are hard and kinky wet or dry. Even manilla, which may be like silk, attains the hardness of steel in the mill of competition; but the *Magician*, run on lines of rigid economy, perforce wore braces and running-gear which were wickedly hard and kinky.

Charley Filcher, managing owner of the bathing-machine, probably knew the reason; so did the men who hauled and cursed him. They called it perquisites—by which, probably, they meant commissions.

A man who goes through the day without swearing, when afloat in the doldrums, is a man quite empty of passions. He is qualified to enter the Gates. Jack says that St Peter will pass him flying, but he does not mean precisely what his words imply.

A man, too, who passes the night without breaking his toes on a ring-bolt, is the man who has skulked while his shipmates were sweating.

And now, towards sundown, the *Magician* was in irons, with the great steel yards swung "to box her off." She leaned there to a newly sprung breeze, her courses



hanging in the gear, her stay-sails tripped, drawing her track with her beam.

A ripple of fluttering canvas broke the silence. High aloft the sails spoke of an evolution successfully accomplished. They clanged ready for work; and on deck men stood waiting the word. But Philip had "hauled heavy" too often to be reckless when a minute or so would enable those he ordered to "haul light." He stood there watching the leeches, noting the trend of the vane, a *Conway* boy suddenly at the head of things. He moved to the break of the poop and gave the word in Collins's fashion.

"Haul the port braces—slack away there, bo'sun! Let her have it!"

It was immense.

Ensuing there came an interval of shouting and song, blocks talking, breeze humming—then once more, quiet. The quiet of the doldrums, sails asleep, swell gurgling and slapping at the rudder-trunk, licking at the slime on the bends. The warehouse had dragged perhaps three miles towards home, and Jack swore he had dragged five crimson miles of braces.

Three miles of the tedious thousands standing to confront them! Well, it counted, and, at the moment, were they not lounging on hot spars, the calm again regnant, flat, still, gorgeous with the light of a dying day? Were there not, too, perhaps a dozen purple splotches dotted vaguely about their horizon, splotches triangular, square, oblong,—all standing silent against a sky which flamed?

Jack examined the splotches and swore. He always swears. That is his genial fashion, and it fits him like the skin he wears.

So—there was no question at all about it. The warehouse had pushed, during the last half-hour, into the ring of ships that wait and doze and swelter in the belt of calms we call the doldrums. She had reached the southern limit of the north-east trades, and might sit down now and pray for a slant.

Heigho! All men pray in some guise or dress, but

whether Jack's prayers, as delivered in the doldrums and elsewhere, will be reckoned to his credit or otherwise is a question which will be answered only at the Great White Throne. Philip, telescope in hand, searching those dim blotches, daguerretyped against the sky-line, found time for a phrase which spoke of gratitude.

"Thank God for that, anyhow!" he cried, and again sighted his glass, stared into the flaming arch, grew noticeably restless, and said in his teeth, "I believe it is . . . Gad! I believe."

It appears from this that the boy had resolved the problem put daily before sailors, and had discovered in one of those dim blotches the home of Nita, the will-o'-the-wisp, the fairy who moved before him, always bright-eyed, radiant, and beloved. But he tramped the poop, telescope under arm, gripping hands with delight. To speak too soon, he decided, would but call down the criticism of those with whom he worked.

A scratch, a splutter, and two or three strokes will figure a man, if the pencil be held by an artist; so, too, a bunch of poles carrying canvas more or less stretched against the sky will figure a ship to a sailor. And from the hang of that canvas he will presently deduce her name and her destiny. That blotch of purple lying in the eye of the sun, just clear of an up-tossed coruscation in carmine, was a four-master, barque-rigged—and, by the cut of her royals, the *Padrone*; so Philip decided, hugging his telescope.

A purple wedge, ten, perhaps fifteen miles distant. A calm dominant. Night coming on, and a swarthy array of clouds towering about the horizon. Anything might happen. The turret rising so menacingly astern might frustrate the intention of the dark patch glowering dead ahead; on the other hand, the dark patch might maintain its march and push them back again towards 'Frisco. But in Philip's mind there lurked no doubt. The squall astern would rise, and it would bring the ships together. The squall on the lee bow

and all those other figments would vanish before it,—for Nita was there, and was that not reason and to spare why these two ships should come together?

Feathers lifted! That was the attitude of the *Magician's* commander at this moment. Chin in air he stalked the poop considering his achievement. Alone he had done this thing. Alone he would carry it out! Calms? Gales? Pish! Botherments these, set in the path purposely to test the nerve of Conway. Mutiny, drunkenness? A short-handed barn, known as Charley Filcher's bathing-machine, what of these? In Conway's mind, if they stood, they stood as annoyances, frustrations perhaps, then a phrase stirred—Oh, hang! Come on. Philip marched the poop, whistling.

The men who had sweated and sworn while pushing the warehouse fell into line speedily at sight of the ships. Here was evidence, if any were needed, that Conway knew how to shoot the sun and prod a meridian. "A chap can't chance these things. A chap'll jolly well fizzle out if 'ee don't know, w'en 'ee comes to be put to it—like uz this!" Sails decided, waving a hand vaguely around the horizon. "No landmarks 'ereabouts, as I know of. 'Aven't bin hever since we left 'Frisco—as I know of. Then wot's this?"

Sails looked at the bo'sun for information, and the bo'sun gave him, "Grain ships—home'ard from 'Frisco."

Sails sat silent under the infliction. The man was his room mate.

He crossed over to interview Chips and found him dreaming, the centre of a group, barefooted, sucking at his pipe.

"A ship as passes the line without the company of her kind," Trelanick decided, "is a ship navigated by a dunderhead. It's a wonder to me that men are left to tell the tale.

"All ships meet on the line, just as all ships meet at the edge of the trades. You'm pretty sure you'm somewheres in the world when you'm stuck up with a batty of ships like yon."

The men passed this without comment. They were

smoking. The solace shrouded them in a blue haze and left them indolent. About the horizon, perhaps, a dozen squall clouds towered in blobs of purple, some advancing, some receding, some developing the water-spout—a point descending from the cloud, a point ascending from the sea—twisting, swirling, breaking away, fading in mist. Upon the sea were some birds, the last stragglers of that batch which had met them off the Golden Gate, eyeing one giant albatross sitting like a swan on the water.

He had come up from the south, perhaps in the company of one of those who dallied across there in the gloaming; now he paddled, waiting to escort the *Magician*—the wisdom of the ages in his glance.

Trelanick saw him presently lift from the water and flap cumbrously to gain an altitude, and his dreams became words.

"Can't get up easy, them chaps," he asserted; "get stiff in the doldrums, like we shell-backs."

The bird swept past, regarding him gravely, head twisted to see.

"Bet you a dollar 'ee keeps us company to the 'Orn," Sails ventured.

"Albatrosses is like rats," Chips decided, withdrawing his pipe for the effort and retiring again in a cloud.

Sails watched him sidelong.

"'Ow's that?" he questioned pertinently.

"Rats leave ships when they'm goin' to sink," said Trelanick, "an' albatrosses don't take up wi' 'em."

"Ho!" said Sails.

He puffed for some minutes considering this, then said—

"That don't make a albatross like a rat—not so fur as I can see."

"No?" Trelanick questioned.

"Blowed if it do," Sails decided.

Trelanick had nothing to urge in explanation; he stared dreamily into the red glow dying in the west.

"A rat, to begin wiv," Sails withdrew his pipe again, "as a matter o' fower legs; a albatross 'as but two as

I know of—legs as is more like vins than anythin'. Likewise a rat's black an' a albatross is w'ite. Likewise a rat can't fly an' a albatross can't walk. . . ."

"Yes, he can," said Chips. "You wait till you'm on a cliff near by his nest, then tell me if he can't walk."

"But that don't make 'im like a rat," Sails expostulated.

"No," Trelanick admitted, "it don't make him like a rat."

"Minute or so agone," Sails averred, "you said it did."

"Did I?" Trelanick smiled.

He stared into the swiftly falling darkness, marking the lift and fall of the swell running like blood at the ship's side; examined the track drawn by a mollymawk, rising and footing the waters as she rose; saw a rosy nautilus close wing and sink at the splutter, then turning upon the group he gave voice to his credo—

"I never want to go to sea in a ship where there's no rats," he intoned. "An' I'd like to leave the ship an albatross won't follow. I'm wondering whether we'm goin' to be followed or otherwise by yon chap in white?"

A light puff of air came down to where they sat, and they looked up to see Philip moving across the poop, hand held high to feel the breeze for which he prayed. "Job comin'!" they decided, and sat mute.

Conway advanced to the rail and gave it form. "Square the main yard!" he shouted. "Mizzen braces there, some of you."

Then in the swift gloaming, sky fading, stars peeping, a zephyr came out of the north to push them still farther on their way, to hustle them up with the group dallying there on the rim of the sea. And with the wind came rain—rain in blobs, rain in bulk, rain from heavens with the bottom knocked out.

Philip marched the poop, jubilant. His theory was bearing fruit—but he could have done without the rain.

The men hauled, spluttering. They took off their shirts to the hot downpour, and raced bare-legged and

capless with the braces. "Round she comes! Let her have it!" was the cry, and the decks, aflood with warm water, gurgled a monotone at the scuppers.

Water in their eyes, water in their ears, the men paddled through it. Hair lank, torsos gleaming, tattooed arms upheld to swing off brace and down-haul. Shouting, stamping, a-whirl with the frenzy of movement—so they trimmed yards, downed stay-sails, and set the bathing-machine simmering towards the line.

For an hour she continued, resolutely drawing the track she had commenced off 'Frisco, then in a darkness which came up to meet her, she folded her hands and sat down to doze. Again no wind stirred. Again the great sails cluttered up there where no man could see them; again the crew groped at the fife-rails, coiling ropes which were mutinous.

Philip marched now in despair. Which would win—the leeward or the windward squall? It was dark. He could not see what came. The heavens were one wide shadow—blurred, impenetrable.

Eight bells!

Far off and very resonant it clanged at the edge of the forecastle. Monotonous and dulled was the voice which followed—"All's well!"

A sailor flung back his hair with an effort. "Hall's well?" he questioned vaguely of the dark; "Filcher's well—that's wot 'ee means."

He proceeded to divest himself of belt and knife; stripped the clinging dungaree from his buttocks, and plunged mother-naked in his tub to the waist.

When a man has but one shirt and one pair of pants, he finds it necessary, if he would wash them, to do the thing under the cover of night. There is not much room for modesty on the decks of a windjammer—still, for preference and other things being equal, Jack chooses night. Shanghaied crews are usually persons dressed in a rag and a Liverpool button. The *Magician's* gang fully upheld the description.

Rain. More rain. Nothing but rain. That was the

outlook when the nine o'clock chant went up; and aft, in the waist, was the crew,—men, boys, and afterguard,—naked, swimming, and attempting a laundry. Above them, Philip and the carpenter strove to pierce the darkness which hemmed them.

The *Magician* took no heed of her surroundings; she dozed amidst the soft sea-pillows, lolling in peace in the hollow she had formed. Twin points of light, one green the other red, winked mistily in the rain; a ghostly figment on either bow, one red, one green, mocked her from waters she could not see. She lay there inert, a ponderous tank crammed with grain, and waiting for the power which had forsaken her—asleep in the tropics.

Out there in the opaque stillness other tanks dozed. Across there, to the southward, a tramp steamer crawled, foaming at the bows, butting at the rain-curtain, and clothed in smoke. North, south, east, west, ships stood at pause, armed each of them with an odd pair of eyes, one green, one red, a hot flush smothering them. The hand of God lay over all.

The night was black. Anything might happen. The tanks out there held grain,—three thousand, four thousand, five thousand tons,—cased in gimcrack steel, inert, motionless; and approaching them was that ponderous thing of the freak brand, scattering the water in beads, that lighted her slamming progress; a tramp hidden from the tanks by the rain, as curtains shut off a street. Her signal lamps were in position, but they, too, belonged to the freak brand, as did the owners who bought them. At any moment she might break through the curtain and move irresistibly upon one of those who dozed. Then the steel would rip apart and scatter the grain for the fishes; the crew would swim till they sank, and the underwriters sitting blind and waiting for news in great cities would pay for the flutter.

That is what faced these people who carried the grain—yet they frolicked, unconscious, revelling in the cool airiness. For plugged scuppers had produced a very

efficient bath, and the men argued that they might just as well stay on deck in a tub as venture to sleep in bunks which were shower-baths. So they remained on deck, and they swam and they larked and they washed clothes until ten o'clock clanged, and with it a whistling scream from the murk.

Something, at length, from the void they faced.

A figure on the poop advanced at a run, and leaned over the vault to shout, "Hands on deck! Stand by royal and t'gallant halliards! Quickly there!"

Philip, alert, but uncertain of the force which moved to greet him, gave the message. A splash of wading men went up in answer, and with it cries from a crew brought suddenly to attention—"Aye, aye, sir! W're's my fersaken cap? Lord! wot's come of my bloomin' pants?"

The scream developed into one long hiss, and the men, tumbling to stations, faced the starboard beam regardless of the fact that they were naked. "Out there!" they nodded, gravely diagnosing the malady. "An' our yards dead square! Mind yer eye, Conway—mind yer eye."

Still nothing came.

But Conway required no prompting. He stood near the break of the poop, his head half turned to search the night—a tall young figure, clad in wet pyjamas, and a peaked cap pulled low to screen his eyes.

Nothing in sight—only the black wall out of which something hissed. A wall solid with rain. A sea flat, lashed as by hail, seething. A sea pricked with points of light, like stars, and ebbing with fires now dim, now flashing. A sea grotesquely changing place with the heavens; the waters becoming milky and luminous, the sky black, like ink.

A fish neared the surface, moving with the rush of a meteor, and vanished somewhere beneath the ship's great bulk; a score of lesser meteors sprang from its path, darting swiftly for safety. Something leaped, a fire of beads accompanying it; a splash sounded, and the fires it had lighted were gone.

The tragedy of life, of pursuer and pursued, enacted under the eyes of men staring into a sea suddenly phosphorescent and milky of hue; a sea luminous and suggesting in its appearance that by some miracle they floated amidst the stars, and were canopied by the sea.

Still came no sign.

Eerie, a trifle weird, a thought flustering for young Conway. A phenomenon which hitherto he had not seen. And now he commanded. Men stood watching, ready to criticise. He jammed down the peak of his cap and sucked at the rain laving his lips. "Oh! blow," he said in a whisper. "What on earth's happening?"

Then suddenly, as the skirl grew louder and the note of a cascade appeared—"It's a squall, . . . a squall coming from there." He eyed the blackness vaguely, glanced aloft, saw nothing in either sphere, and cried out to the helmsman, "Put your wheel over a bit. Steady starboard!"

And a voice in the stillness said, "Starboard it is, sir."

The sails clanged unheeding.

"Lower away your royal halliards!" said Philip again. "Clew up."

The men gave a sigh of relief. So also did the bo'sun, standing to leeward awaiting this signal.

"Lower away, sir. Lower away it is."

A group of naked and half-naked ghosts drew together. They fumbled in the darkness, singing their requiem. Three sails came down with a run, and as they fell the wind sprang out with a scream.

Broad abeam! Shhwirr! Broad abeam!

"Stand everything! Fore-yard up! Haul your port braces. Smart's the word!"

The ghosts forsook their requiem and tumbled over the hatch. They cried and swore in unison, rubbing barked shins and hopping to the braces. "Let her 'av it, skip! Give 'er beans, old son!"

No one answered. No one heard. In that turmoil of slatting sails man's speech recoiled upon itself and fell

flat. Then again, amidst the roar, came the requiem which sailors will still sing when they come to their judgment—and the yards lurched forward, groaning at the ties—

“Let ’er ’av it, skip!
Get us hout of it!
Long to rain hover us—
Gawd save . . .”

“What ho! Belay! Belay!”

The *Magician*, awake once more, slithered ghost-like through the curtain which wrapped her.

Naked, blinded by the downpour, chilled by this burst of wind, the crowd of Johnnies from the slums of ’Frisco bundled the yards to the tune of their leaders. Some knew nothing of unison, some only vaguely knew that a shout meant pull, but they were learning, even as Nicola had learned in the chart-room. They ran down the decks gathering in the slack, and decided the skipper was a hummer.

“Well fore-yard . . . belay! belay!” came from the poop. Then again, “Aft there and trim the main! Slippy’s the word!”

The squall drummed now on rounded canvas, and the bathing-machine drew a line of fire with her sides. It was as though she rubbed shoulders with a giant match-box, and, as the men tumbled and sprawled to their stations, a flash of lightning, vivid, like a fused wire, dazzled them and gave the whiff that was lacking. Thunder toppled about them. The note, that of a falling timber-stack.

Some one cried out at this—

“Who froo that brick?” and the men, accepting it as a joke, laughed brazenly.

A gleam ran down the conductor near which some stood hauling. It fizzled in the sea overside. Crack! Crash! A cart-load this time, and Jack singing, worrying the yards, supremely unconscious of danger. A flame sprang out of space and danced weirdly on the yard-arm they tended. It paused a moment, then

zigzagged down the pennant and disappeared. Jack swore it was the devil with his tail on fire.

Then swiftly there arose a scream which was not of the wind,—a scream beginning low and ending high; a note to bring men at the double from brace and down-haul to search the murk out there in the east; a scream full of portent for those who carry sail on the high seas.

Philip faced the rain, striving to pierce it. The rain blinded him. He could not see. He moved to the edge of the poop rather more quickly than was his wont and cried out, "Up here, Bo'sun. Finish trimming the yards, Sails, and some one sound our fog-horn!"

He moved back. The bo'sun stood beside him examining the wall. Nothing. Only that weird yell ascending again from a groan to a shriek,—a yell that leaped out of space.

"It's a steamer," said the bo'sun,—*"that's wot that is."*

Philip moved a trifle nearer his companion and commented, "I thought so . . . but here!"

"Sir, they're everywhere these days—everywhere."

"I believe you are right. Good! Keep aft, near the wheel, eh?" said Philip.

"Aye, aye, sir."

The bo'sun made his way aft, and Philip faced the wall in silence.

The men's requiem had steadied now and ran doggedly in a minor key, as though in protest or perhaps in prayer—but the yards came round, the sails leaned out to sweep the eastern arc, and the bathing-machine simmered boldly on her course. Nothing in sight. The squall humming, the rain denser, the night bereft of hope—pierced by that appalling cry.

Again the waves stirred. Nearer this time. More resonant. The scream dying in shriller altitudes, and Philip, moving a trifle forward, crying for the fog-horn.

"Now! Let her have it. Three blasts!"

The tin-pot signal brayed its message to the winds, and the winds carried it vibrating into the solitudes shrouded by the eastern curtain.

"Again! Again! Keep it going!"

The horn acknowledged the fact that the message was heard. It brayed monotonously. The men stood in a group. They stared into the murk. Then a whiff came down to point the fact that they neared a moment which presently would decide whether the grain they carried would reach those people who clamoured for it, or whether the fishes, who had no need of it, would presently find it oscillating to bother them.

Smoke appeared in that whiff—smoke, wind-borne and drifting across the bathing-machine as she leaned out, yards sweeping the leeward arc.

"See anything?" came sharply from the poop.

"No, sir—nothing."

"Keep your eyes skinned then. A hand in the rigging—quick!"

"A hand in the rigging! Aye, aye, sir."

Cockney scrambled over the rail and vanished in the rain above the sheer-pole. Nothing in sight—but the smoke more plainly present. Cockney hailed the deck, and with his cry came a voice from the forecastle, announcing that he too had sniffed the pungent beastliness. A chant crooned in unison from the pair, "Smoke on the starboard beam!"

Again the fog-horn spoke, gasping at the tension—"Yap! Yap! Yap!"

Then out of the smoke and rain there moved a dim white light, high up, blurred and yellow in the down-pour; a light that shone disdainfully on the bathing-machine throbbing there at its foot; a light which fell upon men who could do nothing to hinder its passage. Helm up or helm down, at that angle it mattered not at all. If the steamer saw them, she saw. If she heard, she heard. If she were pointed to strike, she would strike. That stood beside them, shaking them in the inkiness, that and the hand of God.

Philip gripped the rigging, watching. The sight fascinated him as much by the stealthiness of its approach as by the knowledge of what would happen did she strike. He examined the bearing of the light,

acknowledging that if beneath that dim white eye there lurked a green, then all was well; if red, then all was not well,—that he determined, clenching his teeth.

Silence stood beside them as they watched.

The ships moved, each of them obedient to the force which drove. The dim white eye grew in prominence, waxed brighter and more definite, marched forward until it reached a point on the quarter from whence it must either pounce or disappear. It stood still. Philip drew breath heavily. Then slowly, very slowly, it stole away, faded and vanished in the black silence. Vanished with the men who governed it, without a word, conceivably without knowledge of the proximity of that steel mass which might have stayed it from further butting at the rain clouds.

The hand of God!

Well, we have seen and some of us have read. But Philip and the men stared into the blank wall, searching as though they expected the thing to turn. The tension failed to touch young Conway. The men swore he was salted, and he crossed over to greet the bo'sun, dismissing him from further attendance with—

"You were right. A steamer, crossing," he suggested; "lucky for us it was green, eh?"

The bo'sun left the poop, deciding that he would buy a broom when he reached Liverpool, and fight for a crossing which men could see, and sweep it until some one bigger fought him and chucked him out of it. He reached the main deck, registering an oath which should have sunk the steamer in her tracks.

The bathing-machine buzzed solemnly onward, her sides rubbing phosphorus out of water still sizzling and uncanny to the eye. Philip, standing on the poop, grew wetter and more thoughtful now the danger was past—for was not the *Padrone* out there somewhere in the murk, and was it not possible, in this thick blackness, that a fellow might blunder up against her—all of a heap, . . . or that that fellow might have . . .

"No." He pushed out his hands deciding it. "For in that case I should have known—I should have known!"

Nevertheless, he determined to keep the royals in their gear, even if they blew to Jimminy; and he stared at the sea which was sky, and the sky which was sea, and felt giddy. He seemed to be watching the decks of a ship whose fore-foot ploughed the milky way, tossing stars in an inverted firmament. But the men allowed that they had Jonah on board, and looked aloft for the whale.

Then suddenly, at Philip's elbow, there sounded a voice—

"Vot you mit my schip do, hey?"

Philip sprang round and faced the skipper. "Where the devil did you come from?" he questioned swiftly. "Here, Bo'sun!"

"No—vait! I do nuttings. I only sday up. Irons still here . . . look!"

He held out his wrists, a pathetic figure, podgy, and robed in a shirt which clung like a skin; bare of head, a little bald, bare-legged, unsteady, a certain rotundity evident in a region usually covered by a waistcoat.

"Und, mein Gott! pelow it ies hot—hot! Gome!" he protested, "I nuttings do. I no gan sleep—soh, leave me up."

The thunder growled an accompaniment to their talk, but it rolled now in the curtain to leeward, a region no man could pierce.

The *Magician* slithered through the smoothness leaning on her rail. Far up in the darkness the wet sails drummed, and the spirit fires leaped like the gas jets seen on the side of a volcano.

Philip decided that the man might go or stay, as he pleased. It was immaterial, now that Finch was gone, what he did. And as he stood there watching those dancing fires, the Dutchman's voice came to him again.

"Where you go now—hey?"

Philip glanced over. "Where? Oh, to the s'uthard. Nearly our course . . . why?"

"Nutting," said the Dutchman.

Philip left the matter unturned. He was engaged in a mental calculation of the distance they had travelled

since the squall broke, and wondered, as a side issue, whether it would be possible to see a vessel any more clearly now than had been the case with the steamer.

The Dutchman moved near and adventured an additional shaft.

"I tink you all go to hell," he announced in the voice of one who has no intention of doing more than comment on a fact which is pretty obvious.

"Good," said Philip; "then we will take you with us for guide."

The Dutchman turned on his heel and carried his wet shirt below. The attitude of this *verflucht Engländer* who had usurped the reins of government was so precisely the attitude of all northerners that he failed to recognise it as his own.

Rain, wind, lightning, thunder—that was the order of this night's work, and the bathing-machine buzzed swiftly, perhaps fifteen miles towards home—then again came the calm; stolid, passionless, and the ship sat mirrored on waters which reflected each gleam.

And out of the calm there grew a new day. Light came over the edge of the world. The clouds melted, and the crew saw that they stood amidst a group of ships, misty, indefinite, idly heading all ways, staring at the idle sea which held them; staring, too, at the new-comer who had flapped so riskily into the nest they inhabited.

Philip, aroused at the first touch of dawn, was busy with his glass long before its aid was useful. He picked up the ships as the shadows melted from their sides.

The *Perthshire* lay there, a blotch of warmed purple, draped in gossamer, with lifted courses, perhaps three miles distant; the *Vaterland* lay there, half turned, for the sun to light with pink her lead-coloured dinginess; the *Mary G. Ranger* lay there, taut, trim, and clipper-like, a Yankee from New England, waiting to show the *Perthshire* the way to Queenstown; and the *Padrone* lay there, broadside at length to the lifted day, her canvas blushing rosily against the chasing shadows.

Philip snapped his glass. He had been up all night—

but the *Padrone* loomed high. Nita was there; . . . all other things were bagatelle.

He moved to the break of the poop.

"Bo'sun!" came the voice, quick in spite of its youth, to harass people legitimately resting, "get out the gig and let me have four hands in her as soon as you like."

The bo'sun moved from his pillow, frowning, then glanced over the rail and suddenly bristled—

"Aye, aye, sir!" he cried, and turning to his mates in the house, added, "Tumble up there! Tumble up! Shake a leg and let's see you!"

Somebody growled words calculated to disturb the dust of those who first invented shipping, but he came out, stared, and turned to the man who followed him—"Why, if it ain't the bloomin' *Padrone*!" he announced stiffly.

"If it isn't—lumme!" said Sails.

"Well, I'm . . ."

"No, you're not," said the sailmaker; "they wouldn't take yer."

CHAPTER II.

THE MORNING WATCH.

I

"Clear away the gig!" cried a dominant voice.

The men trooped out, Nicola among them, and stood yawning to solve their environment. Last night had kept them busy. Last night there had been the devil to pay in the way of wind and rain. Now there was a calm,—flat, cloudless, hot, and the crew desired rest.

If there is one thing the average merchant sailor knows nothing about it is boating, but to expect a Shanghaied crew to "clear away the gig" is to expect the ridiculous. They are not competent to clear away

a gig. They look for things with wheels and shafts, and get reminiscences of a gee-gee neighing and pawing the gravel. But when you tell them the gig is on the skids, you pass at once into a region which plainly leaves them angry. A skid is sometimes seen on a cart, but a gig on a skid is unthinkable.

The crew said so definitely as they marched to the ordeal. Those who understood the bo'sun's tongue made questionable jokes in gutter-talk; those who did not, lifted hands and eyes together and simpered, "Geeg—what that?"

Therefore the after-guard came to the rescue and moved, sans coffee, sans smoke, sans hope, to begin the day's work. Nicola, if he understood anything of gigs, would scarcely have looked for one in a situation which he termed generally "monte arriba," and considered he was speaking excellent Eengleesh. As it was, he stood on the deck, barefooted and with his mouth open—a lymphatic specimen from the land of Huns—awaiting miracles.

It was a wondrous hour just after dawn, and the sun, scarcely three degrees risen from sleep, blushed rosily and threw out rays to warm those ragged grain-carriers at their task. It was the hour when, in the tropics, it is still possible to stand barefooted and sample the freshness. The hour when, in well-ordered ships, men spread awnings which shall save the decks and prevent the pitch boiling. But in this warehouse were no awnings to spread. If the pitch boiled out of the seams by day, let the carpenter run them full again at night—or, keep the decks wet. Awnings cost pounds sterling, pitch costs pennies. A warehouse, whether on land or on sea, is built to compete with other warehouses, and must earn dollars. Nothing else counts.

Philip, after he had given that magnificent order relative to the gig, marched aft and stood staring at the *Padrone*, seeking perhaps a signal more precious than any he could hoist. She looked nearly beautiful in the grey mistiness, her sails spread, courses lifted, the curtain scarcely yet drawn. No one on her decks

though—that is to say, no one who counted. Philip examined her carefully. The captain was up, clad in pyjamas; the mate was up; the crew, apparently, were up; but Nita and her mother were not in those deck-chairs just peeping behind the jigger-mast and skylight. Philip decided the thing and closed his glass. Then he marched forward, intent on the gig.

But the gig still sat on the skids, keel up, covered with her nice tight coat and lashings. The falls had not yet got themselves cleared away from the shoulders of the davits, and the yarns which held them there had not got themselves cut. It was a travesty of all that a *Conway* skipper expected, and he leaned over the rail to give point to the fact—as gently as possible.

“Now then, Bo’sun, let us have that boat as quickly as you like,” he cried. “It’s getting late.”

“Seems uz if it’ll get later,” the bo’sun remarked in his sleeve.

“What’s that you say?” Philip bristled.

“I says,” said the bo’sun diplomatically, “as this-yere bloomin’ gig is growed here, sir. That’s wot.”

“Oh,” said Philip.

“An’ I says that so fur as I can make out it’ll take a bloomin’ month o’ Sundays to prize ’er out—wiv this crowd.”

At this moment Freddy came forward to say that the *Padrone* was signalling, and Philip turned round in despair. This was scarcely the result he had expected when he gave his order. He was living at that moment in his *Conway* days—with Nita thrown in—and now!

He turned and moved aft. The day had advanced sufficiently, it seems, to reveal to the *Padrone* the identity of that stranger in grey which had come up with her during the night. So she hoisted three flags, “D W F,” which asked concisely, “How are you?” And on her decks there were women,—women dressed in white. Nita—the girl with the dark eyes, the girl Philip loved.

Philip had no thought of the boat now, nor of the signal held out across the rigging. He was busy with

his glass, and when Freddy suggested that something must be said in reply, he cried out, "Oh, yes—I forgot—hoist . . . oh—hoist D W F, and go to the devil."

Freddy winked monstrosously and obeyed. It is safe to say that if Philip could have put an accent on the "you," or if he could have said secretly, in one hoist, "How is my little girl?" he would have said it. But the flags know nothing of little girls. They are concerned with magisterial inquiries, longitudes and fripperies of international importance, and, unless you use the spelling-table, are dumb about love.

Philip could not use the spelling-table. Freddy would not have suggested it. Only the dead can afford time to use the spelling-table of the Commercial Code of Signals. So they hoisted D W F and paused for results, and Philip, tired of staring at a face he could not reach, waved his hand and moved off to the boat.

It still sat on the skids. The men still eyed it in doubt. The bo'sun, sailmaker, Cockney, and one or two efficient still hammered and prised and swore at lashings and clamps and grew hot. They worked in a bath. It was appalling.

Philip had nothing to say; and the bo'sun, acknowledging the restraint, waxed eloquent.

"She's stuck on the skids: growed to 'em wiv paint. The clamps is stuck. The lashin's are like steel rods. Them rigger chaps as fixed 'er saw to that; an' if they didn't, how long would she a stuck 'ere, I wonder?"

The bo'sun lifted a red face and paused for a reply. Philip smiled at him. "Good boy!" he said; and the bo'sun leaned down to wipe his face on his sleeve.

"A packet like this can't do wi' loose boats," he grumbled. "Loose boats go squimy-well over the side, quick as knife it. A packet like this car's 'er boats in groves—otherwise she comes 'ome wi'out 'em."

Philip acknowledged that he was learning. "I'll stand Sam for all hands," he promised, "if we get her in half an hour."

"Done!" said the bo'sun.

For some minutes they worked in silence. Then, with

head thrust forward and eyes staring, the bo'sun added a postscript to his lecture.

"She's safe up here," he growled; "safe uz houses. Safe uz the chap uz falls overboard is safe to drown—w'ile we're freein' 'er."

And again the bo'sun's head disappeared like the head of a turtle scenting danger. But Philip had no mind to retaliate. He knew, moreover, that the statement was true. He knew that ships like the *Magician* or *Padrone* carry boats only because they are compelled to carry them, and that if they slung them in davits, ready for use, the seas would smash them on sight.

Meanwhile Freddy manipulated the code like a born signalman, and presently found a new conundrum confronting him. B P C hung in a twisted jumble on the *Padrone's* halyards.

This sent youth to its mentor by the davits. "I say!" he cried out, "he wants to know when we sailed."

"Very well," Philip retorted; "tell him."

"But it will take a month with the code, old chap."

"And this boat will take a month too," Philip laughed.

"It will be a dead heat."

"Can't I flag-wag him?"

"Yes, if you like. Clear out! I'm busy."

The supreme moment was at hand. The after-guard had succeeded in casting the gig adrift, had taken off its coat and hooked the tackles. Now, with a big shout of triumph, they hoisted her, swang her out, and brought her level with the rail, with five minutes in hand if that bet was to be won.

The bo'sun stood hot and important on the rail, issuing his instructions. "Oars there, some of you. Bailer. Look to the plugs; see them safe. Mast, sail—will you have the breaker, sir?"

"Never mind it," Philip decided. "We can get a drink over there."

"Aye, aye, sir. That's the ticket," the bo'sun acknowledged as he saw men carrying out his desire. "Now then, stand by to lower away. Jump in there one hand

and fend off. No larks now; this is a gig, my son, and you can't eat it. So! Lower away."

They lowered. The boat reached the water with three minutes to spare, and Philip acknowledged that he owed them "Sam." But when the boat reached the water it was found that she was thirsty. Apparently some one had forgotten to give her a drink. Therefore, now that the opportunity had arrived, she laid her sides to it and guzzled without shame.

The bo'sun scratched his head when he detected water on the bottom boards, and swore that the plugs must have been left unfixed. He sent several members of the crew to perdition for their neglect, and ordered Larry down to refix them. But the boy found them secure, planted like knots in the wood; and presently he hailed the decks to say, "She's weeping—weeping all round! Weeping at every blessed seam!"

The bo'sun swore softly, then turned on Larry. "Weepin'!" he cried out. "Of course she's weepin'. Did you ever 'ear tell of a boat as didn't weep—in the blighted doldrums? Bale 'er out, my son, an' no back talk."

So Larry took a seat in the stern and scooped out water with the baler. He baled violently for fifteen minutes, and at the end of that time a running bow-line was placed about his middle and a bucket sent down on the end of a line to aid him. He set to work afresh, sitting squarely in the middle of the after-thwart. He baled till breakfast-time, seven bells by the clock, then hailed those who watched him for the end of the suction-hose.

So they brought a portable pump from forward,—a thing used for washing the decks when the *Magician* was too indolent to do it herself,—and they put four men at the handles, with orders to "jig-ee-jig muchee pronto—savvy?"

Four of the *Magician's* sailors acknowledged that they savvied. They jig-ee-jigged up there in the hot young day, and sweated and stuck to the pitch,

which grew soft, and wondered whether in this world or the next a breeze would come to end the jiggling.

At ten o'clock the gig held so much water that the oars and sails were sent up and re-stowed. The jiggling had become a necessity now, whether she were used or not—for men cannot hoist a boat up a ship's side when she is full of water, nor can they hope to lift her high enough to withdraw the plugs with the ordinary tackle fitted on a windjammer's davits.

At eleven o'clock, sun pouring down, sea like oil, Nicola came to take a turn at the brakes with three others. Nicola, the Hun, who knew nothing of "ships," of them all managed to plant those great soft feet of his on a deck seam which had melted. Like hot wax it stuck to him, and when he essayed to lift his foot a piece of flesh remained behind to plug the seam.

Nicola's dark eyes looked curiously at the gap in his foot.

They were big, stupid, heavy, brown eyes, set in a face quite innocent of beauty or refinement or intelligence, but they looked at the gap and grew luminous.

He sat on the spar-end considering what he must do. Then the bo'sun missed him, and ordered him to "get along and start jiggling." Nicola turned up the sole of his foot and said plainly, "I, no. I 'av ketchee." He glanced about, searching for the thing caught, and ended lamely, "Plenty mouch malo."

"Plenty mouch no caree ze work-a!" the bo'sun commented, stooping to examine the thrust-out foot. "Good—ketchee piecee rag—oh, Lord!—Kannevass, savvy?"

"Und binden oop tight as Moses in the Ark—savvy?"

"Binden—ess," said Nicola.

"Washee first . . . binden afterwards—toute a lour—bimeby, see?" the bo'sun explained.

"Ess," said Nicola.

"Right-o! Vamose. Jilde . . . dekkko-hai, savvy?" the bo'sun added gustily.

"Ess," said Nicola.

"Ess," the bo'sun repeated; "then why in flames don't ye hop-it?"

"Hoop it?" Nicola questioned, lifting his gaze.

"O 'ell!" said the bo'sun, "wot bloomin' lingo do yer talk anyway! Git!"

And Nicola rose to get. He hobbled off towards the pit, leaving red marks as he moved. He glanced back and perceived the marks, limped, and fell into the vocabulary of his masters.

"Zat damn!" said Nicola concisely.

But his eyes only registered a confused astonishment.

II.

The gig was alongside, yet it was impossible to use her. She sat as her wheeled namesake would sit in water, rails awash, tilting and lurching gravely with each movement of the weight that was in her. Larry baled, the pump clucked, and still the water strove for supremacy. The gig, apparently, had learned something of the manner of those who were her masters.

Philip marched the poop considering this thing which stood in his path. The bo'sun alternately watched the pumping operations and his skipper. Freddy struggled gamely to keep up his end of the conversation with the *Padrone*, and had been successful until the *Vaterland*, lolling to the eastward, questioned, "Is that the *Magician*?"

Then Freddy decided his cup was full and turned to Philip. "What is a fellow to do?" he questioned plaintively. "I've just told Collins how we are and what we had for breakfast, and here is the Kaiser starting the game again. I vote we . . ."

"Yes," said Philip. "Do it, whatever it is, and don't worry. I've got to see Collins if I swim for it. How's that boat, bo'sun?"

"Full to 'er bloomin' heyes, sir," the bo'sun reported.

"Then clap the bow fall round the capstan, and heave her up!"

The bo'sun looked gravely at the tackle, but he had heard the order and come to a decision. He called Larry

out of the boat, fastened a strong line round the bows, and gave the word to march. The men tramped heavily round the capstan, lifted the boat's nose perhaps a couple of feet, then came to a halt with a stranded fall. Some leaped to the rail to haul taut the line—but in a second the tackle parted, and the boat flounced back to resume her guzzling.

"Thought so," said the bo'sun; "them falls is fit for the junk-shop."

"Afraid we ought to have slacked the after-tackle," Philip commented. "Never mind. Get it round the capstan and lift her up stern first. I'm going to use her or break her up."

"Good!" said the bo'sun. "She's no use diddlin' there. Hang on here, Shellbacks, and clap the fall round the capstan."

A couple of longshore-men moved to the fray and unfastened the rope. They stepped leisurely to the capstan, while the bo'sun and three others clung to the tackle.

"Quick!" said the bo'sun, "or you'll have us froo the bloomin' block! Move yerselves!"

"Vot?" said the Dago, halting to look round.

"Quick! Rounda capestanta!" Philip shouted. "Pronto—savvy?"

The Dago savvied—he placed the rope on the capestanta and shook back his curls. But he placed it the wrong way, and the bo'sun came near to suffocation. Sails and Chips were helping him hold the boat, and with him were slowly rising to the davit-head. The strain was intolerable.

Philip leaped on the rail to assist them. "Shift your hands!" he cried. "Good—we'll manage her."

But the bo'sun looked over his shoulder at the Dago.

"Oh my bloomin' aunt!" he groaned. "Send me a bib and tucker so as I can dress this blighted shellback. Other way round!" he roared. "Oter-a lou—back side to front side, you thunderin' cocoon!"

"Reverse the palls!" Philip ordered. "Haul tight and reverse."

The Dago stared. But some of those who knew ran to his assistance, and the boat was saved. They hoisted it stern first to the davit-head, put a line about it, and lashed it to the rail. Then they stood back to plume themselves and get cool.

"I think I'll make it grog-oh," said Philip, with a touch of despair in his voice. "Tell the steward there, Freddy."

He turned on his heel and marched the poop, telescope in hand—but there was no despair in his mind. He intended to board the *Padrone*. It was necessary to consult with Collins, and he would get there if he had to swim—that he decided as he marched.

With a log and a paddle he could have reached the *Padrone* catamaran-fashion and in no time, he told himself, if the sharks left his legs in peace. But a catamaran takes time for construction, and here time was one of the elements lacking. A plank? No; on consideration he tossed the plank aside. A strip of canvas lashed to a couple of oars would carry him. The sea was still. No wind stirred. There were no clouds—only the pitiless sun pouring down from a vault, white-hot and opalescent in hue. But he could not board the *Padrone* from a canvas sack. This was not the place for obstacle races or any other species of fooling—still, oiled canvas would keep out water, and . . .

Suddenly he stood still. The thing was plain in his mind. By boat only was it possible to reach the *Padrone*, and by boat he would go. He advanced to the break of the poop and leaned over. The men were grouped about the cabin entrance, taking their tot from the hands of the steward,—eight or ten grimy tatterdemalions from the slums of 'Frisco who knew nothing of sailorising, and a sprinkling of after-guard. These were the people he had come to lead and who were going to drive the *Magician* round the Horn, or drive her under.

They smiled there in their ignorance, and smacked lips over the conciliatory tot. They lived again. Conway was a skipper worth his hash. They swore it. Then heard him call the bo'sun, and saw that tried man gravely mount the ladder and join his commander up there on the holy poop.

They decided that again a job was on the way to meet them.

Conway had something to say to the bo'sun, something that sent him presently to the main deck wearing a broad and satisfied grin. He joined Sails, Chips, Cockney, and Yank, and spoke with them. Then they called the men together, lifted the boat to the deck, turned her keel up, and put her coat on. When lashed securely the thing fitted like a glove. She only required a bow of ribbon to make her skittish. But instead of ribbon they borrowed from the paint-locker a keg of tallow and spread it on the canvas in thick butter-like dabs. Then they hoisted out the gig and sat her on the water—a gig cheated of her right to guzzle, a gig fit to ferry men to kingdom come.

That was the bo'sun's dictum as he stood watching the oily smudges with which she wooed the deep blue sea; and when Philip, in his best white ducks, with a crew of four picked men, pushed out from the ship's side at four o'clock, he leaned against the rail and sighed.

"To kingdom come or anywheres else, she's safe uz 'ouses . . . but ten hours! Lord save the chap uz falls overboard from hus!"

But here again the bo'sun did not mean precisely what the phrase implied.

CHAPTER III.

THE CAPTAIN'S SILENCE.

At dawn on this day of brilliant sunshine Captain Collins rose and went to the poop. On the main deck men worked busily at the pumps. The clang of them came up, advising him of a condition which annoyed. He advanced and stood leaning over the forward rail.

"Any suck yet?" he questioned.

"Yes, sir—once."

"Right!"

Collins moved aft and took up a position where he could lounge unseen by the men. The steward brought his coffee. He took it and sipped luxuriously, dabbling barefoot in a pool. It was cool at this moment, comfortable, brisk. The sun pierced the thin pyjamas he wore, speaking plainly of a hot and stagnant noon.

Collins finished his coffee, lighted a pipe, and stood revelling in the brief airiness. Nothing moved aloft. The sails hung flat, heavy with dew, unstirred by the placid sea. They flung long pictures across the western seascape, pictures which lay still as glass—a darker glass than that which flared out there in the glittering east. The horizon had not appeared. Mist lay over it, shrouding the clear, hard line which presently would encircle them. On the main deck men moved busily scrubbing down. The swish of brooms and water came up to where Collins stood. The pumping was done.

Something lay over there in the greyness beyond the touch of those long shadows; something darker, something a thought more solid than a cloud. Collins lifted his glasses and again leaned on the rail. In his mind he knew that one of the ships had come up with him during the night—and wondered which.

The mistiness couched on the face of the tired sea became thinner; a suggestion of sails grew in that cloud-

like shape; blocks and ropes leading from nothing to nowhere appeared, high up, amidst a fleecy veil which streamed side-long, like a wind which magically has taken form. These stood out at length as the royals and top-gallant sails of a ship; but so silent, so motionless, that easily they might have been the sails of some forgotten merchantman, perished in this burning zone which had challenged her and claimed her for its own.

Then out of the grey space which bared the sails two figures rose without movement—up the ghostly rigging, up and up, one on the main, one on the mizzen, like shadows treading the air. They reached the royals, paused there a space, then passed down and re-entered the veil. Silent they came, silent returned. From nothingness again to nothingness. Collins watching, silent as they were, accepted them for the men they were.

The sails stood near at hand. Scarcely a mile distant, the skipper decided, facing the vision; this Vanderdecken of the tropics, lying like Coleridge's "painted ship," still "upon a painted ocean."

As the sun gained power the mistiness trembled and fell away, leaving on the horizon a picture he knew in every line and detail.

Long, rather straight bulwarks, tumble-home and lacking in sheer; moulding ending at the bends; low, wide-spreading sail area and four small red vanes set upon the gilded truck of each mast. Out of the deck hamper, through his glasses, Collins discovered other tokens, made, as he had made these fluttering vanes, to hide the ugliness and make the ship more beautiful for the eyes of those two who voyaged with him,—a teak-wood spar-board, carrying the ship's flag and motto; a teak-wood rail and ladder surrounding the standard, all by degrees stood out and told the watching man the identity of the vessel which had come up with them during the night.

As an artist revels in colour and pounces rapturously on a well-conceived scheme, so a commander of the old

school steps rapturously about the decks of a ship which has carried him. Here is the field whereon he has won fame or blows. These are the decks he has trodden in fine weather and in foul. There the block which sprang loose and nearly laid him low. Up aloft the yard from which four men were swept that night when it had been necessary to carry sail or leave her on Diego Ramirez.

Those four fluttering bits of scarlet bunting, placed horizontally over the gilded trucks, gave a note of distinction to the grey vessel they dominated. They are trifles evolved by no shipbuilder of modern days—when he is planning a warehouse. They are put, when you find them, by some one who has pride in his work, who revels in the old-time beauty of the clipper, and turns with sick heart from the iron-sided monster, her descendant. They are placed—as the spar-boards and roped staunchions and coach-whipped sheerpoles were placed—to bring nearer the picture which has faded, and make home, in a sense, more home-like.

It was the *Magician* Captain Collins leaned there searching,—the *Magician* which held his money, which had carried him thousands of miles without injury despite her bathing proclivities, and now aimed to whip the grey monster he lorded and complete his ruin.

Yet a touch of affection lingered. They had been happy on her decks; Mrs Collins regretted her more roomy cabins. Nita had played in them, and had grown from the age of childish wonder to the age of womanly wonderment; from the age when, under her mother's eye, she had practised scales and Mendelssohn to the age of Brahms and Chopin and Tschaikowsky.

Collins admitted these things as he watched her; then moving to the break of the poop he called the mate.

Jackson, a short and sturdy personage in shirt-sleeves and bare legs, wet to the eyes from his experience with a hose which squirted through a dozen miniature nozzles, arrived and admitted that it was the *Magician*. He put on his coat, wondered when she sailed, and presently suggested a talk with the flags.

Then commenced that interlude which Freddy had

found so wearisome. They hoisted a signal, and waited till nearly breakfast-time for an answer; saw the *Vaterland* add to the boy's difficulties; saw the flags, obedient to the laws of gravity, hanging flat, like wisps of coloured rag, and got no details till nearly noon. Then Freddy took to flag-wagging, a method which announced more quickly the perils they had encountered.

At first it seemed difficult to grasp exactly what had occurred. Freddy's spelling was often at fault, his phrasing peculiar—but there stood the record. Revolvers, knife play, drunkenness, murder—a sufficiently vivid picture of the methods of a captain who ran his ship on coercive principles; and in the end came the sentences which at the moment bordered on the impossible. "Captain deposed," "Devine in command."

Collins stared at his old ship. Philip in command! Good heavens! why, Devine is a boy. He waved a further message, "Can I be of any use? Do you want help?" But the *Magician* lounged silent in the appalling sun glare, her sails white and still, her brass work gleaming. Freddy had turned his attention to the *Vaterland*.

Again Collins took up his glass. Small figures continually bobbed and swayed up there on the skids. Apparently Philip and the rest were busy with the boats. At that moment it seemed that the *Magician*, content with having blazoned her shame, intended to add nothing in the way of detail.

Once during the afternoon Collins sought out three flags, and with Nita's aid again asked—"Do you want assistance?" But after an interminable interval the blue pennant crept up to say—"No."

Nita begged that a boat might be sent, despite this. Her father, however, decided that it would be unwise to interfere. "Devine is there," he reassured her; "can't you see him?"

Nita's glass showed nothing of her hero. A group appeared,—people who moved about and seemed amazingly active considering the heat. So Collins focussed

the telescope, slung it to a backstay, and left her to dream in peace.

Thus it was that Nita was the first to espy the boat when at length it left the *Magician's* side, and the first to call her father from the long chair where he reclined praying for a breeze.

He crossed at once and levelled his glass. "A boat coming—eh? Yes, you are right—and Devine is in the stern."

"Philip," Mrs Collins smiled, her hand on his shoulder.

"Very well—Philip. Heigho! Here you are, little girl. Feast your eyes, and keep your head—and," he added after a momentary pause, "if you love me as well as you love Philip, make him chuck the sea and turn to underwriting."

Nita lowered her binoculars and came near. "You are my dear old dad," she whispered, touching his arm; "of course I love you."

"I said, as well," he reminded.

"Oh—but you see," Nita explained, her face suffused, "that is . . ." And again the look said more than words.

Collins smiled, but Nita raised her glasses and examined the figure in the stern sheets. "It is Philip," she announced quietly.

The boat came out of the distance, leaving an oily smudge on the glittering sea. Her appearance was strange, so strange that Collins examined her with his glasses. The day had been full of surprises, but the gait of that boat seemed to suggest that others were in store. Devine steered, four men pulled, but they approached slowly, heavily, without snap.

As they drew near Collins hailed the trim young figure sitting so placidly in the stern.

"What have you done to my gig?" he questioned.

"Put her coat on, sir."

"Forgotten to take it off, you mean!"

"It was the coat or a swim," Philip laughed. "But she's tight now. Way enough! Unrow!"

They clattered alongside, and the boy reached the

poop in a trice. "How are you, sir? How are you all?"

He glanced round, gripping hands, searching especially for the face which a moment ago had appeared above the rail, smiling and full of allurements.

Mrs Collins noted the look and said, "We are well, Philip, and Nita is . . . Harry, where is Nita?"

But the Captain was not prepared to hasten the end he saw. He turned to move aft, and Philip crossed to the chart-room.

Nita stood there watching his approach, her eyes veiled, soft, her hands outstretched—a white figure of entreaty. He stepped over the sill and caught her in his arms.

"My little girl!" he cried out.

"Philip!" she whispered, her head bowed. Then swiftly searching his face—"Oh! I am so thankful."

"Thankful?" he questioned.

"That you are safe."

He watched her, smiling.

"Of course I am safe," he assured her; "why—what is it?"

"It's that horrid mutiny," she declared. "You might have been killed—and then—and then . . ."

"But I am not. I couldn't be while you love me—now could I?"

He held her close, searching for the answer, and it came, "No, dear, nothing can happen—ever . . . while you—"

"I," Philip corrected gravely.

"I," she reiterated, lifting her eyes to his.

"Love you," Philip suggested.

"While I love you," she obeyed, and hid her face on his shoulder.

"That is your credo, sweetheart?"

"Yes, Philip."

"It is mine too," he announced.

They stood there, with the sea gleaming and palpitating at their feet; the sea, which even here moved restlessly, hinting, behind a set smile, of its power to crush

this gimerack grain carrier and all that trod her decks. They stood there, with the white glare of the sun streaming through doorway and port-hole, falling in long beams of vibrant light upon them; and they saw nothing of the danger to which they were exposed, nothing of the beauty of their credo, only that it was theirs, that it was their life, and with it they would face the sea, or the world, or the terrors of the vast loneliness, where sea and sky meet and the clouds alone throw shadow.

They stood in silence.

And then across the dream a footstep made way, and a voice cried cheerily—"Now then, Conway, come and explain those signals of yours, and try a smoke."

So they moved forward, found chairs beneath the small awning Collins had contrived, and Philip commenced his yarn. It took long. Some of the details were appalling, but Philip slurred them, speaking in the fresh young voice which had won their hearts in the long ago. Nita and Mrs Collins sat enthralled. It had all happened so vigorously, so lightly. A touch of humour ran through it.

The blue-nose mate especially had captivated Philip's imagination. What a man he would have made! The grim duel which ended up there on the stark forecastle of a ship drowsing in the tropical night, came in for kindly treatment. It appeared that Blue-nose had points which, in his life, seemed rather blurred. He knew nothing of fear. His method of rule was force; and the Dutch skipper, the man who inspired these events, was a cur, a toad, a thing flabby and useless directly the bottle was withheld. "And so you see there was nothing else to be done, sir," Philip concluded. "We couldn't wait to be shot at—besides, we couldn't afford to lose any more hands; so we had just to clap him in irons and work the thing ourselves." "The thing" apparently stood for the ship, and Collins accepted that view.

"And so they made you captain," he remarked slowly. "Do you know what this means?"

"Perhaps I don't—quite."

"It means courts of law, lawyers—fighting," Collins warned him.

"Then we shall have to fight," Philip decided.

"Fahlun will call it mutiny on the high seas. He may even persuade some of the men to side with him."

"Then we must fight the harder, sir."

"Very well."

"You see," Philip explained, "I am the only one left who can navigate. What else could I do?"

"Nothing. I only wish to point out the difficulty of your position, and to advise you not to attempt to keep your skipper in irons. You mustn't do that, unless—well, unless it is absolutely necessary."

"No, sir. We decided that some days ago. He isn't in irons now. We have fenced off some of the cabin and he stays there. We have a guard on day and night."

Collins sat a while considering this. A question arose in his mind—ought he to countenance this business? Should he not advise the boy that he must put in somewhere and get more help—set the captain ashore and find another? He objected to this. Conway's difficulties would be enhanced, not cured. Conway's freedom would be jeopardised—it was difficult to predict what might not occur. And before him the boy sat, his face eager, straight-lipped, square. No sign of fear in those eyes. Nothing but determination in mouth and chin. Youth on the edge of events. He decided to back the boy, and to do his utmost to help him.

"And so you are going to run her home?" he smiled.

"Yes, sir. If you will help me," Philip added.

"How can I help?" Collins threw out, waiting.

"Give me a few tips. Tell me where to find trades and fair winds and things. Give me some notes of your track. Let me keep in touch, and . . . and I'll navigate her anywhere."

Collins laughed in spite of the gravity of the situation. This boy, it appeared, was another of the breed who know no fear—or was it that he did not understand? Collins, marking the pleading eyes and earnest

manner, was inclined to think the former held good; or perhaps it was that he was content to believe that it held good.

The sun was drawing to an horizon which glowed like a belt of burnished copper when the two rose and stood a moment staring at the ship which presented so difficult a problem. A purple ship now, silhouetted delicately upon a shield of flame.

Affection welled in Collins's heart; pride in Philip's. Collins desired to save her from the grip of the Dutchman who still had legal possession of her; Philip rollicked in the notion of command. Like all new burdens, the weight and responsibility appeared infinitesimal to Philip; the warnings just croakings of a colony of daws. Collins saw the dangers; Philip saw the pleasure of "worrying her home," and dreamed of the shout which would go up when his shipmates on the *Conway* knew.

The two passed down the cabin stairs and came into the saloon. There, with a lamp lighting his charts, the man unfolded his experience, dotted down positions, marked dangers, and pointed to possible meeting-places—giving the boy in that brief lesson just those hints which are invaluable, and are found in no directories extant.

Night had fully come when they returned to the poop. A glow lay over the western arc. The east already slept, wrapped in blue haze. Across there in the distance, her canvas towering, her grey sides blue, lay the *Magician* at rest, still under the stars. No wind stirred. No sign of wind indeed—except in those flickering points which pierced the blue; points which of late had seemed content to sleep. Both men noticed the phase. The clarity of the air, too, was a new qualification. The horizon stood in a hard dark line, intensified towards the south-east.

Collins touched Philip, pointing to it as he halted a moment by the rail.

"I shouldn't wonder if we have a breeze to-morrow," he said. "But if it is calm, and you are able to leave

again without risk, come over. I have some news for you."

"Why not now, sir?"

"No—I don't quite like the aspect. We mustn't carry you off, or there will be no one at all to navigate my old ship.

"I am sending M'Neal, my second mate, to help you," he went on after a momentary silence. "You will want some one when you get down south. He is a good, strong Scot. I would trust him anywhere, or to do anything. I know him: he has been with me for years, . . . and I am giving you one hand. Can't spare more as things are. But you will want them. Oh, and no nonsense about racing, mind. Put that out of your head. We are not quite—er, adapted for racing. While I think of it, too, you maintain your position as captain—M'Neal is mate. He understands." Collins paused abruptly, then extending his hand added—"Well, good-bye, my boy; . . . good-bye and good luck. We shall meet again—somewhere."

They gripped hands, and Philip attempted to thank his friend; but the grey, strong man checked him at once.

"I know no one I would rather help than you, Conway. There! Go over and make your salaams to my wife and Nita."

So Philip crossed the deck and came to say the word men find difficult in most circumstances, but in these, hateful. A starry seascape encircled them. The silence stood unbroken even by the complaining sails and grumbling yards. Life was not given us for good-byes. It was given us for love and happiness. Philip had no doubt on this head, but he doubted much whether Mrs Collins, who sat in a chair near the fife-rail, really slept. Nevertheless he came to Nita's side and knelt beside her.

"How shall we say it?" he questioned, taking one hand in his.

Nita lifted her eyes to his.

"Need we?" she returned, smiling, a faint attempt

given with eyes which stood in a face as white as the blouse she wore. Then after a pause, her hand on his—"Wait. I have something to tell you."

He remained silent while she searched his face. Then with a swift whisper she asked, "Did dad say anything about the ship?"

"Which—ours?"

"No, this one."

"No. Why?"

"How can I tell you? I ought not, but it worries me; and it is unusual, and mummie doesn't know either."

Philip smoothed the hand that lay on his and replied without hesitation—"You and I are one, sweet. There could be no secrets between us—could there?"

"No. You are right. There can be none."

She spoke softly because of the presence of that dear one who had shut her ears lest she should hear words intended for others; but she spoke swiftly, incisively, on a subject quite outside the ken of the god of love.

"No. I will tell you. It is this. Why is it that dad works at our boats during the night? What is he putting into them, and why does he not let the men do it?"

"How do you know all this?" Philip questioned, a trifle startled.

"I saw him. At first it was by accident. Later I watched. I think he has nearly finished now,—and another thing puzzles me. They pump the ship out always at night."

This time Philip was on guard. He smiled, then questioned lightly, "How do you know all this?"

"I have seen them."

"Does Mrs Collins know?"

"I am sure she doesn't."

"Then don't tell her . . . er . . . how long do they pump, and how often?"

"For hours—every night."

Philip kneeled, suppressing fear. The thing at which Collins had hinted was upon him, and he was keeping his wife and child in ignorance. He was preparing,

stealthily preparing, for events which might . . . which might happen at any moment; which might abruptly write the end across hopes which a moment ago belonged to these two without fear. Philip rose suddenly, almost angrily, then swift to gather the possible reading of his movement, searched the neighbourhood and returned. He knelt again, took Nita's hands in his, clasped them firmly, and said—

"Ships often leak. Wooden ships want pumping every watch, sometimes iron ones want it too. The reason they pump at night is because the men have nothing else to do; and as for the boats, well, isn't boating the captain's hobby?"

"Yes—but, but he works at night!"

"Well—why not?"

"You don't think it strange, then?"

Philip allowed no suspicion to lurk in the answer that followed. "No," he decided. "Why should I?"

Mrs Collins moved in her chair. The sound of feet tramping aft came up to them. They turned to listen.

Then quite suddenly Nita reached out and put her arms about Philip's neck, drawing him down to her. "God guard you, my darling," she whispered. "Keep close to us. Keep very close, for when you are away I almost forget my credo."

He stooped over her, their faces one.

"Good-bye, sweetheart," he ventured lamely. "I must go."

"Not good-bye—so long; a sailor's *au revoir*," she answered, her lips on his.

"So long it is. So long!"

And that was good-bye.

For at the same moment a loud voice, shouting from the bottom of a well leagues removed from these two, announced a gig which miraculously had arrived alongside. Mrs Collins awoke with a start. Nita held Philip more firmly. Philip rose to his feet, got rid of the detaining hand, marched over, climbed the rail, and got into the gig.

Those were the precise actions which followed the voice. They occupied perhaps three minutes of time, but in the minds of these two they posed as hours.

To the white figure leaning now on the *Magician's* rail they posed with additional weight. The man moved off to action, to continue that fight he had begun; the girl remained to inaction, to watch, to wait, and to pray. Hopeless? Scarcely. Yet the moments crawled. Then some one whispered that Philip would return with day, and Nita looked out upon the sea which had swallowed him.

CHAPTER IV.

BOUND SOUTH.

Seven days in the doldrums, five of them spent in getting in touch. A night when hazards ran. One outstanding dog-watch, then a flick of wind which drove the ships apart, and on the seventh the *Padrone* lolled heavily alone.

Across there in the distance were other grain carriers. The *Perthshire* astern ten miles, a mere speck in the sun-glare; the *Vaterland* no longer worrying any one with signals, hull down in the west; the *Mary G. Ranger*, three masts in one, tall, with snowy canvas, beating the *Perthshire* and saying so; the *Magician* ahead and to windward of her friend, carrying her royals stowed, a burgee flying at the jigger.

The *Padrone* flew a similar colour—the red, swallow-tailed flag of the code which, singly, means nothing to any one, unless, as here, it marked a ship which at sunrise might otherwise remain unknown. Collins and Philip had agreed on this and other signals during their talk in the cabin, and now each recognised that there would be no visiting to-day; for were they not five miles

apart, and was it not possible, in presence of that wind-racked sky, that something might spring upon them now and keep them apart?

So they flapped, the one behind the other, and drowsed away time, waiting perhaps for another chance to speak with tongues, and leave the dull code in its locker; and day followed day, and night night, until the trades swept down upon them, and set them simmering on their way.

Sometimes five miles separated these two, sometimes ten. Sometimes by skilful dodging Philip was the rearmost of the twain when morning kissed the blue, sometimes Collins. Each day the red flag mounted to the jigger truck, each night a light. Nita found the light more restful. It moved in that deep solitude like a star.

One weary day on the line, with the trades unaccountably flagging, Philip so manœuvred his ship that the *Padrone*, which at daybreak had been sighted some miles astern, came flapping lazily within hail. Philip and Nita dreamed of calm, of one more pause before that long burst in the rolling forties which presently would engulf them; but at six bells in the forenoon watch, when the two ships had crept almost within earshot and Philip's mizzen yards were seen to be aback, the breeze freshened. And with it came the *Padrone*, aiming boldly to pass to windward.

Collins stood aft watching the helmsman. As the ships drew together, a round of cheers broke out, ensigns came to the salute, Philip and Nita sorrowfully waved farewell, and Collins trumpeted through the megaphone—

"The trades at last! Pity we couldn't have that other yarn. Look out for us, and good luck."

So they passed foaming through the radiant day, the *Padrone* laughing at the artifice which had been used to allow these two a peep. But in Philip's ears, as the great ship surged ahead, there rang another note—the note of the pumps, which had kept him company since that night when Nita put her questions.

His answers, too, troubled him. He could not shake off the feeling that perhaps he had been unnecessarily brutal. Besides, he knew nothing of leaky ships. And the thing might increase—then . . . He appealed to M'Neal for light, and that kindly Scot, playing the game, replied—

"I have haird that some ships always leak."

"Iron ships, M'Neal?" Philip insisted.

"Ou aye, here an' awa'. But wi' the *Padrone* it is no conseederable. True, it might increase; but on the ither haund, it might teck up."

"And if it does not take up?"

"Then they will aye pump."

"How long does it take each watch?" Philip put in subtly.

"We didna pump each watch," M'Neal declared; "we pumped at night."

"At night, M'Neal—why?"

"Weel," said the Scotsman, candour visibly present here, "ye'd no hae us skearin' the women-folk wi' the reeng an' blatter o' pump feegments like to yon?"

"Is it loud, then?"

M'Neal dropped his gaze. "It's nae saft," he threw out.

Philip acknowledged the point. He knew now how it happened that Nita had gained this knowledge, and he decided to keep the weather-gauge, even if it became necessary to stow the upper topgallant-sails to pander in these light winds, to the *Padrone's* slower gait.

So they moved down seas which again had life and sting; found means of crying out with the flags, "How are you?" and felt happy if only BRC¹ flew to encourage them. Five thousand miles lay between these two grain carriers and the end of the world—not as the crow flies, nor as a steamer shapes her course, but as the windjammer sails. For perhaps two thousand of them they could count upon the weather with some degree of certitude—for that is the space ruled by the

¹ All well.

lordly trades; but afterwards there ensues a waltzing period, a period accompanied by snow or rain or hail, sometimes the trio nakedly vigorous in one; and Jack, when he comes in touch with it, vows that it shall be the last time he attempts to round Cape Stiff, or carry grain for any one, the very last—and sometimes it is.

The *Padrone* slouched towards this period, slobbering in seas which should have left her dry, grinding her rivets, and weeping through all those straining butts. She came scatheless to the latitude of Easter Island, but far removed to the west, and here, after a brief interval when the ships again forgathered in a distant and mincing fashion, a norther caught her and hustled her foaming into the forties.

One day, nearly upon the verge of them, Philip, sailing discreetly astern, descried a monster asleep upon the waters,—a long line, which undulated in a manner which the silly season would recognise at a glance. The sea-serpent! Philip had come upon it—and there was Nita, eight or ten tantalising miles ahead, missing the chance of a lifetime.

M'Neal, the mate, was below, reeling off arrears of sleep, or perhaps he might have warned his chief. But Conway was in command, and the word went forth—"Bring her to a couple of points! We'll have a look at it." So they brought her to, and the *Magician* washed her face as an experiment, and sent a hen-coop clucking into the gutter.

Philip marched the poop unconscious. Out there, now a trifle on the lee-bow, was the *Padrone*, sails snowy in the sun-glare. On the weather anchor-stock, the serpent trailing limp upon the sea. Dead? They hauled yet nearer the wind to examine it, weather clews lifted and roaring menace. The sea slashed over them, painting them black. And ahead was the slim monster, growing each minute in length,—a brown, thin line, a line sometimes hinting at coils and knots, submerged and difficult to pin down with the aid of binoculars.

They came nearer—the shape had grown, but it had become less marked. It was scarcely a serpent, even of the sea brand—it was as big as a road, it wound like a road through the mountains, the coils were wide and flat. Curious! Philip rubbed his glasses.

They came nearer—the thing was broad, a streak of water, more yellow than red. They came upon it, and the seas tossed grain upon their decks for men to sample.

Some of the grain awaited by those hungry ones out there in the east? Grain from the plains bordering on the Rockies? Grain pumped by the *Padrone*? It lay in her wake. Grain jettisoned by the *Padrone*, the ship which carried Nita hazardingly towards the Cape? Again, it lay in her wake.

Philip marched the poop with a pulse which hammered. He ordered the helmsman to return to his course. The sea-serpent was dead in all truth. At that moment even M'Neal's brisk allegories would not have allayed distrust; Sails, Chips, Bo'sun—none of them would have availed against that track of grain, swelling and bursting on the waters of the Pacific. The ships must speak. It was imperative. Also, as they stood at this moment, it was impossible. So the *Magician* spread more wings, shook out those royals of hers which had been so long stowed, and strove to come up. But at nightfall the *Padrone* was still on end, a blue blotch which could decipher no signal made by her friend.

Through this night the norther blew lustily, and swept young Philip up with the light which had dallied eight hours in the murk. But ships may not come too near in the darkness, even when kindness prompts; they lie off, and those who have bought or fitted a flash-lamp, and know something of the Morse, dot and dash each other in comparative safety, and at no cost to their owners.

So Philip blinked with long and short flashes—"How are you?" and got back in answer, "All well. Fine breeze."

Philip had nothing against the breeze, but he stowed his royals, and asked discreetly, "Is Captain Collins on deck?"

The reply came back through the blackness, "Yes. He is signalling." Then, after a pause, "What is it? Anything wrong?"

"I want to ask," Philip switched out, "whether you came across some grain to-day?"

"Grain?" the lamp questioned, then after a pause there followed, "Careful!" the attention signal, and "Don't come too close."

Philip was puzzled. He moved up to windward and altered the course, but they were not too close. He came back again. A squall was growing up there where the wind held revel, but squalls might be expected. They arrived with precision—nearly hourly, rain accompanying them; still, that may have been the reason for this sudden order. Philip reached the rail and blinked—

"I have taken in canvas. We are dropping astern. Will you tell me whether . . ."

The *Padrone's* lamp broke in, winking with extreme deliberation, "If you have any message for Nita," it said, "speak out. I must go."

And Philip, flushing crimson in the dark night, replied, "I have. My love—and God bless you all."

"Thanks," said the lamp. "Good-night."

Good-night. Nothing more. All blank hereafter—and somewhere on that leaking warehouse Nita lay and dreamed.

The squall broke over them, yelling. A blur of rain and sound encompassed them. They swept on, feeling one for the other, enveloped in foam and fire—the fire of the gale which carries in its arms rain and black darkness.

A light aloft, sometimes dim; a gleam from the binnacle; a dull-green sheen on the starboard bow,—those were the signs at this moment of the valiant

Padrone, marching dog-tired to the aid of those who cried for her grain.

But when the squall had passed even those small signals were hidden from those who walked, searching.

Morning dawned, grey, charged with battle; a dim green smudge marking the birth of a new day. Far down on weather-bow the skyline showed a sail—a sail so distant that under that glum canopy no glass could find a flag.

Philip questioned if it were the *Padrone*, and swept the horizon. Nothing else. The world was cleared of grain carriers but for that one blotch. Philip called M'Neal, and the pair decided. Two points nearer the wind, boarded tacks, the sea a beam—these were precisely the conditions in which the *Magician* could give her sister two knots in the hour. They brought her to. The *Magician* lurched in the pother, recognising an attitude she admired. With a beam sea of recognised weight even the old ships were not to be trusted; but on the *Magician* and her tribe, in similar conditions, men walked with death. She was wicked. She aimed to smash. She watched her chance and scooped—that was the men's version of what happened on this and other occasions.

Philip went below leaving instructions with M'Neal to give her the fore and mizzen upper topgallant-sails. He was tired. It was his watch below—and he dreamed of sufficient sleep to make him fit when they came up with the *Padrone*. But when the sails were set and the spanker thrown in on the mate's initiative, it was as nearly impossible to lie in a bunk as it was to stand in one place any two consecutive minutes. So Philip found some spare pillows, wedged himself against the bunk-board, and slept till nearly noon. At that hour he rose, went on deck to look for the sun, and discovered the *Padrone* slashing through the greyness still three miles ahead. But it was the *Padrone*, and the sun was banked, and the signal reported by M'Neal simply suggested a comparison of chronometers at noon.

A grey day. A day lacking in any touch of colour. No one on the *Padrone's* deck. No heartening message—only the dull business of positions and the long slam after a rival who apparently did better than Philip had expected. Well, it was something—and perhaps later Nita would come out and wave!

Philip marched expectant. But as the day waned the wind increased. There came rain, a touch of bitterness at the norther's hand, and Philip knew that he could see no handkerchief even if it were waved.

At sunset the two ships stood out against a sky lavishly smeared with green, red, mauve—then night drew the curtain upon them.

Philip took in those sails he had spread at sunrise, and watched the glass. Since noon it had fallen two-tenths. That was to be expected—still, something was in the air to-night. The sea reflected it. It rolled there in the darkness, slopped over the rails, and played rounders with a handspike washed from its rack. The *Magician* was in a wicked mood. As a bathing-machine she resented the pace, as a warehouse she resented the long grey rollers constantly rising and trying to lift her. She scooped at them, hoping, perhaps, to rob them of their power. Her decks ran white under the hurrying clouds. Life-lines were stretched about them. They looked like a net, in which, at intervals, specimens of a giant fly became entangled. The bathing-machine resented the nets as she resented the pace—she poured water upon them and waited for results.

Twelve o'clock. A gusty gale blowing in squalls. Eight bells. Again the voice singing its melancholy watchword, and a new crowd moving from the doors of the pit to relieve the wheel and take their station—now on the poop. Seven men, two boys, escaped from the clanging iron which had sheltered them, and stood shivering a moment to get their sight. The *Magician* acknowledged their predicament. As yet they were blind. Good! She lurched heavily up to windward, bowed to an advancing greybeard, and scooped the crest in tons. Caught? She leaned over, listening

—the dead weight of water rushing solid at the men.

Yank felt it coming. He cried out to those less learned in the art and dashed for the fife-rail. Three followed him, two others clung to a life-line—but Nicola, the Hun, a man with one foot still “binden oop,” knew nothing of what was expected of him, and stood to see. The water took him carefully on its recoil, swished him shouting to windward, then with a giant effort dashed for the lee rail.

Spars and an iron bulwark confronted Nicola as he moved head first on the torrent; an iron rail, iron staunchions, iron ports which flapped, clanging—all hard, dividend-earning iron and steel. He crossed the main hatch clutching at elusive straws. A squeal escaped those stupid lips, the dull eyes espied perhaps danger, and “Gott!” was his cry.

Then he came to the rail and butted. The squeal died. No one had heard it except the *Magician*, and she was busy washing the colour from a rail which had not stood in vain.

The seas slammed heavily upon it. The *Magician* trembled under their blows; still, she had cut another notch and was proud.

But Philip, when he went below, stood sorrowfully over the log-book and scratched, with a hand that dripped rivulets upon the page—“Nicola, A. B., shipped in San Francisco, missed at muster. Supposed to have been washed overboard. Rather bad sea. Ship labouring heavily.”

The *Magician* thrilled with pride. She lifted her side to the night, sloshed at the seas, and scattered the searchers.

“Good old bathing-machine!” they cried out; “what price a drink?”

They shook fists at a ship that sizzled in the gloom.

CHAPTER V.

AT THE DOOR OF THE BALLROOM.

Captain Collins, Nita, Mrs Collins, and the mate sat on the cabin floor taking dinner. Their feet were pressed against the stateroom bulkhead, their backs against a settee laid on its side and lashed to the staunchions. The barometer, hanging in a darkened skylight, described jerky circles above their heads. The swinging tray, emptied of glass and vase, cut similar capers beside it. From without came the roar of seas tumbling and drumming on iron.

It was the dinner hour—one o'clock—and the cabin should have been lighted by the sun; but down here in the fifties the commander of a warehouse battens his skylight and lashes a tarpaulin over the usual cover, lest things happen when he is busy and unable to attend to it.

Collins nursed a plate; Nita, Mrs Collins, and the mate each nursed a plate and ate cautiously. The steward, arrayed in long rubber boots and an oilskin, swayed over them, and saw that their plates were replenished. He looked solemn, like a giraffe practising steps for the can-can. Nita smiled as she watched him. Then when the deck was tipped at an impossible angle she placed her mug upon it.

The steward saw. Perhaps he was expecting it. At all events he approached, balanced like a tight-rope dancer, watched it skid towards him, pounced, and bore it in triumph to the pantry. There had been occasions when his rubbers failed to save him, and he thundered across and fell, like an avalanche, upon the bulkhead—perhaps this was what Nita waited to see.

Outside rigidly barred doors the decks were awash to the fife-rails. Seas thundered from side to side; ropes, dragged from their pins, trailed through the scuppers and waved alongside. The *Padrone* was debauched,

drunk, slobbering from the surfeit in which, shameless, she continued to revel. Away in the north, perhaps three miles distant, the *Magician* mimicked her faithfully.

The pair had come, roaring and foam-clad from their long halt, to a point on the edge of the fifties where, to all intents, the waltz begins. For eighteen hours they had lain as they lay now, banging with their hard-weather sails on the rigging, and scooping the waters of the Pacific. Out there, in that blur of mist and cloud sinking in the south-east, was the ballroom—a space littered at this season with hummocks and floes and drifting bergs; fragments filched by the gales from the Antarctic.

Calm reigned, and a mountainous swell moved solemnly to greet them. About the two ships, sailing steadily, or sitting at rest upon the waters, were the birds which watch over Jack when he comes to the ballroom.

Calm reigned. Perhaps one should say there was no wind; for if calm stands for silence, then is it an inappropriate word. A calm in the fifties is productive of more noise than a gale, in a windjammer. All the noises of the world are crammed there for men to sample and assign.

The crew of the *Padrone* stood away from the deck wash, and prophesied concerning the stability of their masts, if this thing went on. The crew of the *Magician* moved warily in their net, remembering Nicola. The great white birds sailed calmly over the rigging, undismayed by the thundering sails. The crews of both ships questioned what it would be like down there where the waltz commenced in earnest. A winter mouth, gutter-deep ships—those were the factors which dominated the talk. Cape Horn loomed darkly in imaginations made vivid or retrospective by environment. They waited events.

The heavy and turgid swell undriven by any perceptible force, marching beneath heavens louring, sullen, stacked with portent, produced this note. It rolled down upon them from the unpierced mystery of the south, hourly increasing in weight. It came solemnly

through the greyness, unruffled by wind, oily to the summit, in swaying mountains of green, stippled and flecked with movement. It tossed them into a valley, and stood over them charged with menace. It threatened annihilation. It came in serried lines, the advance-guard of the force which had hammered and drilled it into form. Hill behind hill, mountain behind mountain, range beyond range, all clad alike in the grey of the wilderness. Unfaced, uncrested, unbroken—so the swell marched in the half light, and came to greet the grain carriers.

The *Padrone* objected to the phase, and met it sulkily. She refused to lift at the force's ordering, but wallowed in it, dipping gunwales at each roll. She swept the glum heavens with her stumped mast-heads, jerking and quaking at the effort. She appeared desirous of jettisoning that top hamper of hers, which impeded her freedom. It kept her eternally at see-saw, when, without it, she might turn turtle and twist like a barrel. Freedom! That she desired of the greyness. She flounced in a bath, foam-clad and spouting thin rivulets of brine. Whirrr! Her masts cut the air and it screamed. Flop! Her counter slashed the seas and they leaped to drown her. Brrrr! She struggled to rise, to admire her manoeuvre, and a monster appeared on the quarter. She lifted grumbling to lord it. She climbed to the summit, sat there, one dizzy moment the warehouse towering, then with a swift cut for oblivion leaned over and scooped with her rail.

The sea thundered in tons on her decks, sounding the drum, searching for crannies, aiming for the grain. But the *Padrone* toppled over to port, and the water creamed over her rail. Nothing started. Nothing harmed. Only the ropes trailing more wantonly in the rush, and a crew wet to the eyes, clinging like flies on a wall.

And about her, swerving, stooping for scraps, crying out, swept the birds who watched over her.

Across there in the steely greyness the *Magician* performed similar antics before a similar swarm. The albatross, which met her long ago, still cruised solemnly

between the two, questioning, in Trelanick's opinion, which of the twain would first show keel.

Last night at sundown Mother Carey had sent her chickens dancing from the void. At noon they were not, at three they fluttered like busy moths amidst the Cape pigeons, at dusk they dipped and sprang and pirouetted gamely; but all the smaller albatross had disappeared.

At noon the two ships signalled position and course, cried out "All's well," and secured the hilliards; but at four, soon after the advent of the chickens, the *Padrone*, having learned nothing of her lesson, twisted a port from its frame and threw the glass in fragments upon Nita's white pillow. Water gushed in. The cabin was swamped, treasures blotted, pictures smashed. Then into the wrecked chamber came man armed with a spanner. Nita's pillow was seized, crammed in the hole, and the blinker screwed upon it. Darkness for Nita hereafter on all days when the seas climbed high to lick the sides of a passing warehouse.

Collins came down to see this work accomplished, then arrayed in oilskins and sea-boots, his sou'-wester tied on, a "gammon-lashing" about his waist, he said good-night to those two who were to share this fight with him and sit still. Mrs Collins, very white and silent, held his arm while he kissed her; Nita, aware only that something unusual was in the air, found opportunity for a smile, and gave it as he turned to look upon them from the door. But the warehouse objected to silence, and flung a sea over the poop which sizzled at the skylight and damned the prescience of those who had battened it.

Dusk was upon them when Collins reached his perch. A small gleam still lingered low in the west. A fiery strip shining on the yellow-green mistiness seemed to point a finger of scorn at the tumbling monster. No wind. Only the rushing wave born of each lurch, and the eternal menace of the sea. Starboard. Port. Water following, thundering on the bulwarks.

Collins stood surveying the scene, marking the weird

outlook, the marching lines of swell, and, in his mind, the tense recognition of their unfitness lurked to fill the gaps. He knew that presently the force which lay behind that swell would emerge and order the fight. He knew they were handicapped. That, at the outset, if it aimed to destroy, then destruction would follow, and his mind took in the sequence of events, the stress of it, the pumping, the hazard to those who pumped standing amidst the rush of waters hurtling in the darkness, the sudden leaps for safety each time the deck tipped down to greet the seas.

Dusk was upon them. Four o'clock. Time for tea and cigarettes in the land awaiting the grain; time for care and watchfulness on the part of those who aimed to reach it.

And out of the dusk, as Collins stood on the poop, the giant albatross which had followed these two so long winged heavily from the *Magician*, took a turn about her sister, and sailed steadily for the land.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WALTZ.

It came from the nor'-west with a ripple of hail to pepper the men who trimmed sail. Quietly, without ostentation, damp as is the manner of nor'-westers in southern seas, it stole from the cave of the winds and set the warehouse simmering athwart the swell. Midnight saw its advent, and for two hours all hands moved knee-deep in water, watched the blackness wake to life, and heard the slap and flicker of opposing seas. The men decided they were in luck, and sang cheerily as they pranced with the braces. A fair wind brings hope to the crew of a windjammer even in circumstances as sloppy as these; but Collins, standing at attention,

grimly silent on the poop, had no illusions. The barometer had whispered certain truths, experience of the ballroom had pointed them; he stood on waiting for events. The swell kept them rolling even more wickedly now that the yards were squared. But there were compensations. There always are. They were moving again towards home.

At four o'clock the wind had increased to the customary gale of these latitudes, and the warehouse drew lines of fire in the blackness. At breakfast-time it had veered a little to the north,—an ugly sign for those who can read it, but it steadied the ship, and at twelve, when the *Magician* had signalled her position, the rain came down to wash the salt from their decks.

The two ships had now entered that space marked by an office not noted for frivolity as "the region of perpetual gales, accompanied by snow and hail and incessant rain." They entered it laughing, wet to the eyes, the sou'-west swell rolling to greet them.

A breeze from the nor'-west was more helpful at the moment than one from any other quartering. It came from the sun-warmed north. It came charged with hail and sleet, but it lacked the icy nip of the south. It came, too, from a quarter which baffled the ice-floes, thrust them back upon their native whiteness,—and perhaps, perhaps it was the breeze which would keep them humming till they had rounded Cape Stiff, and no waltz of any consequence would fall to their share.

They staggered through five hours' gloom, watching a gale which essayed to throw up a sea, and squalls of hail which strove to beat it flat; then again came dusk, heralded by a cheery signal—"All well, *Magician*? Fine breeze. Good luck."

Night closed in upon them, and they sped south-east, rolling, swallowing seas by the ton, and pouring them forth at each brimming. Squalls rushed over them, blotting their lights; but they were moving, running for home. The sails hummed up there in the blackness, reef-points rippled. Grim, stubborn, without life, they charged at the swell, stolid as a wall.

At ten o'clock Collins was still on deck—a silent figure staring into the blackness, cloaked and hooded for the squalls. Since sundown these had steadily grown in weight and frequency, the hail which accompanied them whipping them white. Apparently the swell had risen. He could not see. He gazed out upon a black shape outlined in fire, a shape which reared and twisted under foot, a shape drumming with the fall of seas continually sweeping it.

At noon yesterday Collins had marked his fifty-eighth circlet on the chart, and there lay between it and Diego Ramirez some eight hundred miles—the ballroom of the grain carriers. At noon to-morrow, with luck, Collins decided they would have made a further two hundred and seventy miles. In three days, with continuing luck, they would be down there, reeling past the point at which he had aimed so long—and for the last time.

The sails, ballooning high up where no eye could see, hummed of this man's resolve—the last time! They hummed, too, of the strain they endured. They forced the gaunt warehouse athwart seas which had marched unhindered from the still silence of the Antarctic, and the ship trembled at the contact. She lurched, grumbling, and Collins caught the note. It was a new issue—one not to be neglected. He turned slightly. A shrug escaped him. Then he called to the mate—"Get the royals taken in, and make them fast!" Jackson moved away to obey. The rain had ceased.

Collins crossed to the chart-room to read the barometer. It pumped, sucking at the tube, a convex column inclined to rise. The commander returned to his post. He stood there silent—a tall man clad in oilskins, head thrust forward like a pointer scenting game.

He faced the issue now, and he faced it as he faced the black chasm through which they roared. The voices of the men came up to him, the whang and flutter of loosened canvas. He footed the decks of a ship smoking in the spume, but he could not see her shape. As a blind man knows when he approaches danger, so Collins gauged the difficulties with which she was beset. The

seas swept over her, clanging her ports. She hissed through the blackness like a comet crossing heavens swept clean of stars, her nose luminous, her tail seething in space. She moved towards a point where two gales met, where the seas ran all ways, and the forces behind lie couched, waiting to spring.

Collins noted these facts. He had no illusions. The gale they endured was child's play in comparison with the gale which would follow, yet he was concerned at the moment mainly with the cessation of the rain. That, at all events, was a mercy, but it pointed to the march of events. A new lightness had magically appeared in the air,—a condition which is never in evidence with a gale from the north. The swell, too, had quite perceptibly grown. He could not see this: it was a thing to be felt. He approached the fife-rail.

The deck beneath was a chasm filled at that moment with water, which struck fire on the spars. The watch was down there, singing drearily amidst the wash. Collins leaned forward and shouted—

"Bear a hand with those royals!" Then he moved aft and stood by the wheel, searching that arc whence the new force would appear.

All black. Dead, solid blackness. No evidence yet. Not a gleam.

Collins returned to his post. The royals were silent at last. The mate crept back. Nothing had happened—only the lightness of atmosphere continued.

Four o'clock clanged over the waste through which they sped. The mate went below. The second mate and his watch had taken up stations, and were drowsily counting the minutes which must elapse before coffee was ready, when swiftly in the west there appeared an arch of glittering stars. Five minutes they stood out, twinkling, a picture of hope to sodden men, and with the sixth vanished.

Again gloom reigned, but Collins had seen that arch. He had waited for it, knowing it would come, and now turned sharply with an order which put the seal on rest—"All hands on deck! Smart's the word."

The second mate ran down, reiterating the cry, and the men, scarcely yet warm, tumbled from their blankets and donned the wet clothes they had recently put off. The pit was awash with stagnant water,—a black and grimy place lighted by one dim lamp, which described circles in the gloom. The watch dressed, swearing. They came on deck swearing, damning the sea and He who made it. They crossed the deck in rushes, dodging the icy grip of water they could not escape, and came into the waist at the word. They stood there shivering in the blast, the seas sweeping high about them, and the order was given—

“Square the crossjack yard!”

Some one shouted this,—it mattered not who, for as the crew clung to the gear about the fife-rails an arch of stars, luminous, twinkling nearly to the zenith, again appeared, and they knew that the work was imperative. The ordeal was upon them. They recognised its approach, and settled down to lusty pulling.

To give an order in the windjammer of competition is to acknowledge the failure of the system. The crew of the *Padrone* were picked from the best, and, under their captain's management, amenable; but the ship was short-handed. All ships that carry grain for the British people are short-handed. Therefore in times of stress they are impotent to perform the tasks set.

The steam winches which stood on the decks of this warehouse had no hands for squaring yards or shortening sail. The crab-winches and gipsies and patent labour-saving appliances are laughed at by the lord of the west when he sits down to blow. Under the belt, with knuckle-dusters, anyhow, anywhere, so that you get him,—that is his method. He administers his blows with a malignant ferocity before which man's strength fails and gipsies are put out of action.

In fifteen minutes the yards had been trimmed for a quarterly breeze, and the drenched crew gathered up the ropes which had been used. The wind hung fire. It was impossible to read what came, but Collins judged it wise to be prepared. Again an order went forth—

"Up mainsail! Up crossjack!"

It was the lord's chance, and he saw it.

The sheets were eased, the sails were beginning to whang, to balloon above the yard, to jam the spilling lines. The men were tailed on, hauling and singing their requiem, when the lord espied his opportunity and sent hail to freeze things stiff. A squall escaped from the cave of the winds, and in a moment the ship was clad in white. It sprang upon them with a flick, and the breath of the norther vanished. It broke screaming over the gaunt warehouse, and she heeled suddenly to port, her canvas roaring, the sea sizzling, whipped flat, white under the lash.

The heavens, a moment ago charged with clouds and heavy with moisture, were stripped clean. As a curtain is lifted over the stage in a darkened theatre to show the lighted scene, so the curtain rose over this wind-jammer, showing her the stars blinking, radiant, the hard-backed line of clouds, the scud streaming over them.

"Up helm! starboard—don't let her gripe!" Collins cried sharply, and an officer moved across to give help.

A moment of tension, then the great ship obeyed, and the sails grew round. They bellied once more, stiff above the yards, their shapes outlined in white against the steely sky. The men howled, pulling, and getting not an inch. But beneath them the ship ran steadily. Water no longer flooded her decks. Spume drove over instead, lifting in a wide sweeping curve which crossed her in a bound.

"Avast there!"

A voice from the poop at length, from where Collins leaned sidelong against the wind, staring from under a drawn-down peak.

"Get all hands on the main. Man gear—let cross-jack stand!"

In ten minutes it had become apparent that something must be lost. Collins aimed now to save the best. His voice rose again. He waved his hand to the helmsman—"Keep her away there! Keep her in hand—steady

does it!" Again he moved a pace forward and shouted for the mate.

Jackson advanced, climbed the ladder, and stood beside him, a drenched figure without oilskins or sea-boots. Collins, gripping a rope, swayed over him. They shouted at each other sidelong, their backs rounded to the wind. Beneath them the crew sang dismally on the ropes.

"Take four hands—four!" the captain reiterated, lifting fingers for the mate to see.

Jackson nodded violently. "Just so—four," he acknowledged.

"Get in upper t'gall'n'-s'ls—upper—fore and aft." Collins swept the ship with one hand. "Snug 'em up . . . let hang—then tackle lower. Snug . . . all you can. Smart—essential!"

The mate turned his head and shouted an appreciative sentence, "Ay, ay, sir. Going to blow!" he added, searching the dim line of clouds sunk deep in the west.

"Blowing," Collins decided. He lurched forward, and the two stood a moment at grip swaying on the steep deck. Collins recovered his balance. "In for it this time," he added.

"She's booming, sir, anyway," said the mate, preparing to move.

"Twelve," Collins admitted. "More coming, though." He nodded vigorously towards that quarter where the lord of the west was handling his whip. "Do your best, eh?"

The mate started cautiously for the rail, reached it at one rush, clung on, shouting cheerily, "Ay, ay, sir," and came to the ladder. Then he turned round, descending backwards, like a child.

On the main deck the men worked sheltered by the bulwarks. They sang and hauled and hove on winches until the mainsail was snug and the crossjack had blown to ribbons. Then with six topgallant-sails whanging in space, they crossed with a rush and mounted the rail.

The wind took them here. It essayed to drive them back, and when at length they reached the shrouds, flattened them like paper men upon the ratlines. It

caught those whose coats were unlashed and strove to smother them. It flung the spray high, and it poured upon them with the sting of hurled shot. It strove to wash them from their hold, but they crept up with the gait of men to whom the sea is strange.

The rigging was icebound; the tops already garnished with a *cheval de frise* to cut their hands; the ropes slatting rods clothed in white; the yards, when they reached them, twin poles of steel swaying and springing a hundred feet above seas which hissed like a cauldron.

The men moved along the foot-ropes, hammering at the stiff sails. They crept out, got astride them, jumped on them, smothered them, then climbed down to repeat the same tactics on other masts. They saved all six topgallant-sails, and returned to the deck beating hands and mustering to tackle the mainsail.

Sixteen men and boys prepared for this ordeal. They climbed the rail at a given signal, struggled to the yard, and rested a moment to regain breath. Here was a sail worth saving. It was new, and being constructed of number one canvas, was stiff in any weather; but now it was frozen, a mass which whanged and lifted the yard, showering ice upon the deck.

The second mate took his place in the bunt, and the word went forth,—“Lay out and get hold of her. Skin her up. Smart now, before that squall strikes us.”

The men moved out. Sitting along foot-ropes, sliding down lifts, clinging to jackstay and becket, they crept out and strove to grasp that swaying canvas drum. They leaned over the yard, kicking with their feet, their clothes inflated, flapping. They looked like a row of scarecrows perched over a field of grain: they wriggled absurdly, digging at the sail.

It arched overhead, a rounded shape, stiff and unbending. It whanged like a captive balloon sulkily awaiting the advent of a squall gathering out there where no man could see. It leaped to join issue with the lord of the winds, and sought by all known tricks to rid the ship of those who essayed to govern her.

From the dizzy insecurity of the yard the men's home

looked like a plank tilted hideously upon the foam. It appeared that their weight up there must inevitably cause her to turn over. She swept through the darkness, fluttering.

But her crew were English and "Dutch" to a man, a breed which never knows it is beaten, and for twenty minutes they stormed and fought in a blind attempt at mastery. A piece was captured—whirr! the wind ripped it free. The leach was dragged in—rip! again the thing aimed to throw men backward. A group of seven, close set on the yard, captured at length a goodly slice. They tucked it beneath them, leaning upon it while they struggled for more; they tugged, yelling together of the necessity of paying Paddy Doyle for his boots; then came a voice from the brazen throat of the megaphone—"Lay down from aloft! Bear a hand!"

The men looked round. The sky again was dark. A heavy bank of yellowish cloud had mounted half-way to the zenith. Thin scud, torn from its edge, drove over the ship as mist streams over the cliffs from the sea. There was reason in that order. "Down it is!" they shouted. "Get a move on. Look out!"

The group who had captured a portion gave the word for caution. Some one added in a dull shout, "Mind yer eye there!" and the sail sprang loose. It swerved above the yard, and one who had neglected to mind his eye fell back, executed a double somersault, and reached the lee rail in a trice.

Seventy feet at a bound! A sudden stoppage on iron as hard as that which gave Nicola his rest. A dull thud—like a sack of potatoes tumbled from a height. No other sound. Stillness ever to that grain carrier, and the spray busy washing the stains.

It was dark. The lord of the west was at work—that is all.

Collins stood on the poop, a girdle of rope bracing him to the rigging. The mate waited near, gripping a life-line. The men, grouped about the break of the

poop, commented on the situation as it appeared at the moment.

"Caught!" said one, and turned bloodshot eyes to search the horizon.

"Bowled," said his mate. He took off his cap, squeezed the water from it, and replaced it; then pursuing his metaphor, added, "Middle stump too—see?"

No one answered. They were all intent on the fact that presently there would be plenty to do. A sizzling noise came down the wind—a long-drawn hiss—and at the same instant Collins's voice was heard: "Stand by tops'l halliards, fore and aft!"

Snow leaped out of the murk as the men reached stations; hail accompanied it. The thing whizzed over them hurling icy particles, and the warehouse lurched, grunting, to leeward.

"See that?" questioned the cricketer of his mate, one hand on the halliards, ears cocked for orders. "Wot I tell you—eh?"

He pointed triumphantly at the black arch which towered over them. His mate had nothing to say. The ship heeled solemnly till the lee rail was awash. Then again the cricketer spoke.

"Let 'er 'av it, skip!" He sang the words mournfully, searching for a hint and taking a turn from the pin. "Get us hout of this—give 'er beans, ho lord!" The sea creamed over his boots and he swore softly. "A dollar we down 'em," he added wrathfully.

"A dollar we don't," said his pal. "It's finnin'—see?"

"Your sister's thinin'!"

A sea smote the weather rail and fell hissing to leeward.

"Right; I'll stand a mug o' the best the Lighthouse can find we'll wroastle froo wivout lowerin'," said his mate, stung by the tone.

"Done," said the cricketer. "Mine's rum," he crooned, "rum 'ot wi' a dash o' lemon an' sugar—guess you'll stand, sonny?"

"If we lower."

"It's a bet."

Then suddenly the wind fell upon them, and the ship seemed to smoke in the blackness.

"Let go tops'l halliards!"

"Let go! Let go it is!"

The shout reached down decks torn by spume which leaped the taffrail and swept clean away over the bows. And with the shout came the jar of ropes and chains, the creak of parrels, and three topsails slid growling to the caps. The din was intolerable, the weight of wind something to gas about. And on the poop Collins stood silent, watching,—the man for whose orders all waited.

Snatches of song came up to him as he leaned there reading the signs, seeking to forestall them. It came from men who moved amidst the spume striving to snug the loosened canvas. Jackson was down there ordering events. He could trust Jackson—he had no fear on this head; but out there, in the blackness they charged, it was possible other ships moved and fought for mastery. Ships possibly without lights; ships running, as they ran, gutter-deep at the ordering of Authority; ships hammering to make their westing before turning to scoot for the north. Hazard? The night held nothing else. The gale whistled over them pointing to it. The leak, which had taken up to some degree for days, was again dangerous—and for hours it had been impossible to touch the pumps. Meanwhile the men bandied a question of drinks, naming the Lighthouse as the place where they would guzzle.

The ballroom enclosed them. The grain was *en route*. England desired it—and it waltzed round the Horn.

Something jerked in the darkness, and instantly the ship seemed to quake. A noise of slatting canvas escaped. Some one shouted for Collins's information—"Weather clew-garnet's gone!" And there came in answer a thin voice from the poop—

"Right—haul down on the tack!"

The sail smacked up there in the turmoil. It cracked like a giant whip thrashing over a team. The yard jerked—but the men, led by Webster, captured a length of the sheet, slipped it round a bollard, and jumped it taut.

The cricketer surveyed the work critically. "Twont hold," he decided. "It'll razee the 'eads off them bolts—tin-pot iron—wot c'n yer expeck?"

"I'm not takin' the odds," said his mate. "I'm done."

They were all done. They stood back exhausted, staring at their handiwork.

Some one cried out, "Grog oh!" and they moved aft in a body to take it. The Russian army sings a hymn before and after vodka is served; they face the east and sing on their knees,—but the English sailor clusters round the man with the measure, his bristles on end, his attributes flaunted; he swallows his portion and stalks off grumbling at its weakness. But he is ready at once to fight like a devil.

The lord of the west who ordered the rush of each squall had no mind that the sail should be saved. He whipped up his forces and sent them to charge. They moved under cover of a pall, and broke screaming over the ship. They jerked the bollard from its fastenings, and, armed afresh, steadily thrashed the canvas to ribbons. In ten minutes nothing was left of the mainsail but a fringe of flickering jute.

The cricketer, standing now in shelter, cast his eyes over his messmates. "Wot did I tell yer?" he questioned, grimly satirical.

No one had energy to defend.

"Tin-pot iron," he growled out. "That's wot I said, an' the rest of 'er's sim'lar—you see."

They stood in silence.

The scud streamed over them like a veil torn and flung upon the gale.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GALLOP.

I.

Dawn on the confines of the South Pacific; the sea marching angrily with brazen crests, the sky aflame, slashed with coppery whips, a dun bank of clouds shrouding the horizon, leaping up from it, glowing as from a brazier,—and beneath it, wallowing scandalously, the *Padrone* still carrying her load.

She ran before the gale, because since its advent twenty-four hours ago it had been impossible to find a moment to bring her to. She ran at first because of the heavy thrashing administered by the sea, because all ships run before a fair wind until they are compelled to heave to; but now she ran because in the wind-jammer of competition it is wiser to take the chance of blows while scudding than the certainty of blows hove to.

The modern cargo-wallah is an unclean beast in any conditions: like all cheap things, she is essentially nasty. Running she may sweep her decks, hove to she certainly will. Of this there need be no misconception, no mincing of words. She is dirty. A pig in a trough is honestly unclean, but a slim-waisted four-master is a painted Jezebel, a thing with her tongue in her cheek, before which man bows, acknowledging the supreme subtlety.

When Authority pays her the compliment of inspection she lies at the dock-side, painted, decked—prunes and prism on her lips. To know her and to understand her capacity for devilry Authority should foot her decks off the Horn—when she is guttering homeward with grain, or punching the seas with a bellyful of cement and iron. A pig! The word is uncoined which describes her parts,—yet she revels in water as a pig revels in

food. She slashes at it with her nose, kicks at it with her heels, lays her fat flanks in the trough and ambles. She maims those who tend her. She strives to sweep from her decks the kennel in which they are housed,—that scraped, puttied, and dandified stall which Authority has inspected at the dock-side, and certified fit.

Hove to, the *Padrone* lay on her beam ends, the seas sweeping her broadside; running, she dipped with each rail, and the seas raked her fore and aft. Of the two miseries, Jack preferred to run. He was moving towards home, and there was always the chance of escape; but when a half-manned and gutter-deep warehouse is put through the evolution known as heaving to, things happen which never reach the papers in England. Only the pigeons, the mollymawks, and fishes see,—and they are busy scrambling for scraps.

A wicked dawn it was in all truth that peeped out upon the scene, tinging it with copper, the greenish copper of the wilderness. It showed the giant warehouse in all her miserable incapacity; marked the fact that she was under short canvas; that she lurched over hills which moved majestically to swamp her; that her crew clung there in the waist swinging the pumps, lashed, drenched by the tumbling seas.

A small, cluttering, flurried atom she appeared in the midst of that titanic seascape; less able to fight for her life than the chickens which danced in her wake; less stable than the old-time ships of our fathers, less buoyant, less adapted to her environment. She fled yawning amidst a range of moving hills, the greybeards she was constructed to lord; she swerved uncomfortably on the track she was christened to walk; she objected to the greybeards—they strained her, tossed her about, towered over her topped with foam; she was unable to cope with them; and the mountain-ranges of the ocean—crested, steep, slippery, charged with menace—moved in her wake like a wraith.

Collins was on the poop, a girdle about his middle. Two men, fantastic, wind-blown, stood lashed at the wheel. They steered, gazing with a curious uncertainty

at the compass, and clung to a wheel which kicked and strove to whirl. Now and again one of the twain spoke; at intervals they acknowledged an order from Collins, sometimes from the mate; for the rest they watched the compass or the ship's head.

The card twirled, ridiculously incompetent as a guide. It stuck at no definite place, but swang four points at a jump, came back, tried four points in the opposite direction, lurched, steadied, rushed back. It seemed to be animated. Jack said it was drunk; but it was not drunk, it was cheap. It desired to spin, to ground on the copper container, to spring from the gimbal. It never stood still; and to make it less flighty, man had stuck to the face of it—pennies. North, one penny; south, one penny; east and west, each with their burden, one penny.

Fourpence therefore figured, if accuracy in the ship's disbursements was attained, as the cost of a heavy-weather compass-card, which was their guide. By removing the pennies it was possible to use the same card in a calm. A cheap contrivance. One adopted by Collins in despair; one befitting a warehouse run under competitive laws, and unable to purchase the thing which is necessary, because of the cost.

Men lashed at the wheel worked doggedly, trying to follow that card; downstairs, in a cabin awash with small seas, Nita and her mother prayed to the God who knows all.

And behind them came the greybeards of Cape Horn, sweeping the ballroom, aiming to destroy. A blot walked the surface down there in the half light; they were angry; the lord of the west had sent word.

They came out of that dim horizon after a march which conceivably had spanned the world. No land stands here to bar their progress. They came from the deep solitudes of the Antarctic,—Kerguelen perhaps saw them born, perhaps the Cape. Tasmania got a hint of their weight as they passed; Wilkes Land saw them marching; Auckland listened to the thunder they made; then without pause, nothing hindering them, they crossed

Bellinghausen's desolate sea and broke away for their run to the Horn. Thousands of miles unhindered. Thousands of miles gathering weight. Solemp, towering, majestic, they moved out there in the dawn.

Drake's ships faced these seas; Magalhaens, Cook, Ross, Fitzroy, and a countless swarm of those who followed, all faced these seas. It is left to the gutter-deep tramps, and the freak-ships which lurch to feed England, to discover the peril of the greybeards.

Eight o'clock, breakfast-time on a windjammer whose crew had been at work all night. Collins, in the chart-room, taking his, one eye on the weather as signalled in the west. Two men of the port watch crept aft, and came to relieve the wheel. A squall loomed high over all, the sunrise squall.

Collins came on deck and made himself fast as before; the mate went below. It was necessary to watch new hands at the wheel; it is essential always, for a new touch often spells hazard. As a man driving a restless team is chary about surrendering the reins, so a commander with a ship running heavily is anxious at the change of touch.

Collins turned to mark their method, and saw the helm spinning.

"Steady there!" he cried out; "not so much wheel."

Then again as he caught sight of a swerving bow, "Meet her now! Meet her—then work her with small helm. You understand?"

"Ay, ay, sir. Small helm it is."

The men stooped over it, grinding it up. The swing of the compass bothered them; they had not got grip, and the squall towered. Again came the sharp admonition of a commander who saw the danger of scaring men obviously flustered.

"Steady there!"

"Sir, the compass is swinging eight points—I can't . . ."

"Damn the compass; watch her head!"

The squall broke over them at the word, and the ship yawed heavily. Collins looked up. The man at the weather side was a good one. If he was unable to steer,

and the wind increased, obviously there would be nothing for it but to heave to. He stared into the wind's eye, and caught sight of a monster, creaming in their wake,—one of the big chaps, the greybeards of which Jack sings.

When a commander recognises the roar and menace of a following sea, it is time he sent in his papers. Collins understood what loomed; but he was of iron, his nerve strong—it was the men he distrusted; men he dared not harry at that moment. They gave her too much helm. It requires the strength of a giant to steady a ship which once has commenced to play see-saw before a following sea. Yet Collins was compelled to speak. The men laboured, sweating.

"Steady with her, my lads," he cried out,—“steady does it. Watch her head and meet her quickly. She doesn't want much—but she wants watching.”

The men worked on. A wild-beast swerve had come to the *Padrone*, and before they could control her the greybeard rushed foaming to the quarter. It took her beneath the runs and lifted her high, pointing her nose at the trough it had sucked out there in the gloom at her bows. The ship seemed to stand on end—to stand shivering on the edge of a pit. The foresail fell flat, clanging against the mast, becalmed by that giant sea; then as she tilted, bellied with a smash that shook the ship. She lurched a trifle more. The sea broke over her taffrail and filled her. It rolled clear over her, and she hung shuddering on the edge of a plunge. She leaned over to port, and the water kept her there, pressing her down, roaring like a cascade over the rail. The ship seemed to pause in her race. There was no life in her movement, no buoyancy. Like a drowning man, she appeared to reach up with her hands and claw the air.

The squall flared brazenly to the zenith, peppering her with hail.

Collins lay on the deck half-stunned by the weight which had crashed upon him. He dangled on the end of his line cut deeply over the brow; but he climbed to his feet and regained his post.

Jackson approached, dishevelled, wet to the eyes. "Anything wrong, sir—hurt?" he questioned.

"Nothing. All right—yes, starboard, get wind to leeward—help her up."

The mate crept past him and reached the wheel. Together the three men hove upon it. They brought the wind a trifle on the lee side, and the ship recovered. The water escaped from her decks. Again she ran clattering under the lash, her cordage bowed, her masts and sails gleaming, white, sweeping the heavens through the arc of a circle.

Jackson returned and stood beside his commander. "Better go below, sir," he shouted, glancing up.

"Below? What for?"

"Bleeding, sir—better get tied up." He tapped his forehead descriptively.

Captain Collins put up one hand. "Yes—perhaps you are right—er—any damage?"

"Saloon skylight gone, sir, and the bo'sun's house gutted. Poop ladder smashed——"

"Um—nothing serious. All right below, eh?"

"Yes, sir, all right; but frightened, I think."

Collins stood a moment considering this phase, then looked up to shout—

"We shall have to bring her to . . . if this continues."

"Not a doubt of it, sir,—she's a beast running."

"You are right there, Jackson—quite right." Collins dabbled with one hand at his forehead; the blood ran down to blind him. "A beast at all times—with a gale. Er—by the way, may I use your basin? Don't want to scare people—nothing really, . . . but women hate . . . you understand?"

The mate glanced at the calm face of his commander, and made haste to reply—

"Certainly, sir. I wish I could help, but——"

"Quite so. We want M'Neal now, eh?"

Collins stood a moment staring into the west, then cast off the rope, preparing to go.

"If you ever have command," he shouted, a touch

of passion in his eyes, "never have women in the cabin." He paused, swept the horizon with one hand, and added, "Look at this—is it fair?"

The grey mountains of the ballroom rolled up to point the question. They ran streaked with foam, capped, angry, the immense fury of the wilderness in their pose.

Collins moved cautiously to the chart-room entrance. He passed a group of men struggling with a tarpaulin and ropes to stop the gap which had been torn in the skylight. He spoke a word cheerily, and descending, reached the mate's room, where he doctored his hurts. Then with a small bandage tied tightly under the peak of his cap, he crossed the alley-way and entered the cabin.

Except for the swinging lamp, which threw a moving shadow about the place, it was in darkness. Water slashed to and fro the deck; the fire was out, the ashes wet. The table, armed with a rack and screening cups and platters, showed signs that the cabin breakfast was as yet unready. Collins opened the state-room door and entered, smiling—

"Well—how is it?" he questioned, searching them; "tired of this jumble, eh?"

"Aching for a run," Nita smiled back at him.

The two sat snuggled under a rug on the settee, a "gammon-lashing" about them. The cabin lurched as though it aimed to throw them through the opposite bulkhead. It hummed with the noise of the great seas charging outside. The water rushed up, gurgling at the small side ports. It seemed anxious to reach those cosy red cushions—to drench them and make the two who sat there shiver.

Mrs Collins's eyes went up to the cap her husband had not taken off on entering. She detected the white, and questioned swiftly, without speech—"Are you hurt?"

And his answer told her, "No—a mere scratch"; then pausing at the door until a specially vicious roll was complete, he laughed, "Well—you do look serious!"

They both looked pale. Perhaps this was caused

as much by the lack of air as fear. The precise ratio is unimportant—though both existed. Mrs Collins smiled back and said, "Come over, Harry—come over here. We can't move, and we want to say thank you."

Collins watched his opportunity, and when the switch-back placed him low, climbed and reached the space they made for him.

"Heigho!" he cried, sitting down, "this is comfort. For ten minutes only," he added, kissing them.

He put an arm about each and remained silent, the two heads resting on his shoulders.

"Has it been very dull?" he asked at length.

"Horrid!" said Nita. "Hateful!"

Mrs Collins answered with her eyes, and he drew the arm tight which encircled her.

"We are bowling along, anyhow," he told them. "To-morrow, if this holds, we should be nearly down to the Ramirez—and then . . ."

Nita sat up abruptly.

"Another twenty-four hours of this—oh, dad!" she cried.

"Perhaps more, little girl."

"And—and where is the *Magician*?"

"Last night she was hull down astern, and this morning we had her signal 'All well.'"

"At five o'clock?"

"Yes—as usual."

"But now—where is she now?"

"We can't see her—without going aloft," he added, fondling her hair.

Nita put one arm about his neck and looked up. "Will you send some one, . . . and will you see if—if the signal is flying. The all-right signal that Philip said he . . ." She halted suddenly and tilted his cap.

"Why, dad!" she cried out, "I believe you are hurt—what is it?"

"Hurt?" he smiled, pushing at her hand, "nonsense—only a touch. She's knocking about a bit, you see. Knocking the corners off her crew—making men of them."

"I shall see, if you please," Nita decided, and her fingers went up once more. But he imprisoned the soft white wrist and said banteringly—

"Not just now, little girl. I can't stay. It is nothing."

"Honour bright?" she flashed.

"Honour bright," he returned.

Nita subsided, and her thoughts fell back into the old groove.

"You will let me know about the *Magician*, won't you?"

"When I get on deck again."

She put her arms about his neck and drew him down. "You are my own dear dad," she whispered, kissing him.

Collins smiled, patting the dark head nestling so close to his own. "You are the little one," he answered gravely; "what else could I do?"

They sat still a moment, the wind humming in the room with a note which Collins desired to stifle. He glanced up.

"Do you think you can manage to wind the chronometers for me," he questioned, freeing her, "and work out the rates?"

Nita moved to face him. "Now?" she asked.

"Yes. I am rather wet, you see—I want to change and get back on deck."

"Can't you stay while we have breakfast?"

"No, little girl—not this morning."

Nita unbuckled her lashing, a belt they had contrived for moments such as these, and stood balancing, ready to go.

"When you want me to come back," she laughed, "whistle and I'll come."

She moved off, entered the farther room, and closed the door. Mrs Collins put her arms about her husband's neck, searching his eyes.

"Is it trifling, really?" she asked, "or shall I look to it?"

He assured her it was nothing, and again there

was silence, while the gale swept past and the lurching grew suddenly violent. Collins half rose, then sat back on the settee. Mrs Collins drew him there.

"Tell me," she begged. "What is it like?"

He met her at once, speaking quietly.

"Pretty bad."

"Worse than that time off the Leeuwin, Harry?"

"No; but we may have to heave to."

"Then you expect more—is that it?"

"I think we have the worst now—but she can't run. She is dirty—er—how does the little one stand it?"

"Quietly, dear one; but she is nervous. Last night she clung to me whilst that terrible noise was going on. It sounded like—like the end of the world!" She lifted her eyes. "What was it, Harry?"

"The end of the fore-tops'l. It blew to ribbons," he answered steadily.

"And this morning—not long before you came in—what was that?"

"A sea, dear. Rather a big one."

"She seemed to be dead. She leaned over so far and remained so still, I thought she was sinking. I never experienced quite the same feeling before—and Nita . . ."

"Yes," he took her up, "what of Nita?"

"I felt her shivering. Harry, tell me, what of the *Magician*? Do you think the boy is safe?—can he manage her?"

"Dearest, he has M'Neal, and he has the best ship."

"Yes—but——"

He took her by the shoulders and compelled her to meet his eyes. "You want your breakfast," he announced. "You have had a shaking. The *Magician*, eh? Yes, of course she is safe; but we can't see far among these rollers. You know that."

"Harry! Darling! I want to know the worst," she begged.

He faced her quietly. "I would rather," he said, "that you and I and Nita were on the *Magician* at this moment than where we are."

She held him close, her eyes dim with tears.

"Thank you, Harry," she said simply. "Yes, go, my husband. Change. Get comfortable, and may God protect you for me."

"May He protect us all," was the answer he found.

But as he stood balancing in his room, donning dry flannels to encourage the sea, he paused, smiling grimly.

"I sometimes wonder," he said under his breath, "if God Almighty has, as that man questioned, any sense of humour."

II.

Noon, and a whistling squall with hail and snow lashing the warehouse as she moved down the ballroom; Collins standing to forestall blows dealt savagely by the lord of the west; the crew bunched together in the half-deck sheltering, waiting events; two men clad in shining yellow steering, grimly silent at the wheel; Cape Horn greybeards at work on the grain carrier, tearing at her butts, joggling with her rivets, smashing the buttresses man had erected to shield her.

Iron twisted, plates bent in, houses gutted; no galley; the pit deservedly swept and the lord of the west busy still with his pipes, playing now with staccato touch, accelerating the pace. That was the aspect.

Dancers exhausted? Scarcely. Shaken? Undoubtedly. But not by the sea or the whip. That is left to those who are Dago in blood and endurance, and Collins had picked from the best. Peril at the hand of the sea our men of the north can face without whimpering; but the subtler peril wrought in offices, by merchants busy scrambling for dollars, by a nation which demands to be fed cheaply, by Authority who panders to the craze—these are the perils which shake on the seas.

The crew of the warehouse looked out on their charge, and some chewed grimly in silence.

"There's goin' to be fun didreckly," said one. "Fill up, mates—smoke-oh!"

They lighted their pipes.

The water gushed over their ankles in that dark habitation known as the half-deck—the place allotted by Authority to the training of gentlemen rope-haulers, officers in embryo. The men smoked stolidly. The air twisted in spirals past ports at which the sea looked in. Some one moved across, dropped the blinkers, screwed them tight, came back.

"There's enough water 'ere as it is," he threw off between the puffs; "if we don't watch it there'll be more."

"Can't smoke in the dark," said a voice in complaint.

"Then light the bloomin' gas."

No one answered. The man spoke with the voice of one who will stand by his actions.

Suddenly the ship dipped down, her nose in the air. The water sloshed aft, filling the bunks.

"Somethin's comin'," said a wit; "stand by to ketch hold."

The something came, and for several minutes black darkness reigned in the half-deck. The two thin streams of light from above were blackened; the door, torn from its catch, snapped to; water gurgled and squirted through the crevices. A sea had boarded the warehouse, a hint of the power of the lord who drove it, and the ship leaned over as she had leaned at dawn, shuddering, on the edge of a pit.

The men prodded blindly for the exit, shouting their views.

"Wich way? Gawd! w'ich way?"

"Fast!" said one who apparently had found it. And the cry of those who fought leaped up and stifled it.

"Which way? Hell! can't yer shout?"

"Caught!" said another, groping at the bunk side. "A bleeding trap!"

"Heigh! Wich way—w'ich way?"

"Shoulders to it!" came from the exit. "Shoulders, my sons!"

A gleam of light appeared, and the whole mob stumbled into the lobby. But the door refused to yield. Water still squirted through the chinks.

"Let be—wait till she rolls!" cried a voice in despair. "She'll clear herself then—wait!"

"Wait it is."

"Wait—oh Gawd!"

"Wait!"

The ship ambled slowly to port, the water thundering, but the door remained fast until the carpenter dashed out a panel. Then, as though that was the paltry force which had held it, it clanged back, and the men sprang out.

The sea roared nearly abeam. The mate, a dim figure amidst the whirling spume, stood over them shouting—"Another hand to the wheel there! Are you all dead? Why the devil can't you answer?"

One of those who had fought and sworn in the trap swarmed up the gear and reached the poop. "Ay, ay, sir!" he shouted. "I'm there."

No explanation was offered. Nothing more said. Three men wrestled now with the wheel, steadying the ship, and again the lord of the west retired. Baffled? For the time if you will—but couched, waiting to spring.

A hard-edged bank lay out there shrouding the dim horizon. The sun was sinking upon it, sending out gleams which pierced the slits and holes torn by the gale; gleams of sickly radiance, the light which tinges the spume and smother of a gale, yellow-green, like the fumes over a kiln. It showed the torn warehouse still lurching amidst seas which had striven to crush her; showed the rents she had suffered, the blows she had borne; showed her, at the end of her race, a torn thing, tinged with yellow, which must halt or run under—if man could have seen.

And on her stronghold, high at this moment above the smother, Collins and the mate stood deciding her fate.

"Too deep!" bawled the commander. "She can't get away from the seas. She moves like a hearse."

The mate cast his eye along her heaving flank and replied in the voice of a critic—"She sags. Drags the whole ocean astern. She's a beast!"

Collins apparently did not hear. "We must try her hove to!" he announced with the air of one who threatens. "See what that will do for her."

"Can't be worse than this—anyhow!" yelled the mate.

"Not worse? Yes, she can—ought to try, though," Collins bellowed in return.

"Tarpaulins pretty bad, sir," Jackson announced, steadily aiming for the alteration. "Nothing would stand this washing."

"Not gone?" Collins questioned swiftly.

"No—but . . ."

Collins turned on his heel and stood looking into the eye of the gale. Downstairs, sheltered still by the deck of the poop, were those two he loved and for whose sake perhaps especially he desired to try this change. No work for them, nothing but counting the hours, the lurches, and the monotony of speculating on what damage was done by each sea. It was like sitting in a drum. The blows were intensified by their position. Nothing to do and the recrudescence of past hazards to frighten them. If he brought her to, what would happen? Some ships lie like a duck—but the warehouse! Collins twisted with a shrug—"Quien sabe?" he said in his teeth. "Not you, my friend, nor I, nor . . ."

Through his hands he shouted—"We will try her, anyway. If it is worse, we will turn and scud—it's that last eight inches that has done it."

Five minutes later the mate reached the break of the poop, and the word went forth—

"Up foresail! Forward all hands! Pass the word for idlers—man the gear!"

A lull was upon them—the lull which inevitably follows in the path of a squall. The men sprang to their task as though the trap had never existed, as though they were entered for a race and prizes would be their share. They sang and cut capers out there



where the sea had less swing. They snugged the fore-sail, bellowing lustily; they clewed up the topsail, trimmed the stay-sail sheet, and ran the yards forward. A mad whirl! A berserk rage was upon them: they were playing to euchre the gale, and the sea tumbled about them in tons. It slashed at these men who knew not that they were beaten; it strove to wash them from their place; but they were slippery, even slim, at this moment. The sea lost heart. The warehouse was in trim for her rounding.

Dusk had fallen; the sunset squall approached, a yellow cloud charged with battle. But Collins had his ship now in hand. She moved less madly under the one small sail. At a given moment, the crew securely placed, Collins gave the word—

“Down helm! Let her come to!”

The wheel span round and the gaunt ship twisted in answer to face the seas. She swerved at them, throwing sprays which blackened the topsail still spread. She butted at a mountain which seemed suddenly to rise in her path. She strove to mount it and it flung her back, trembling, smothered in spume, her forward house stove in. Still the helm jammed her at it. Round into the wind's eye—that was the necessity. Quickly, before the greybeard out there reached and swept her. She swerved again, leaped those smaller seas, foam-clad, then hazardously mounted a hill-top and sat there wriggling—but she reached the wind's eye, and her pace slackened to a crawl. Her masts leaned out. Her yards stooped to score the seas. She halted there, a ponderous thing of steel and iron, housing grain for the British people, and out of the greyness came a giant to greet her.

He took her under the bows and strove to thrust her down by the stern. As a woman takes her child beneath the arms and lifts it to settle it in its cradle, so the sea took the *Padrone* and lifted her. But she was stiff, a stubborn beast which still had breath. He grappled with her, seeking to throw her—but she flounced back, a misty cloak about her, and met the crest. It fell upon her decks—a solid lump tipped

with white. It leaped upon the torn house and gutted it clean. It swept the pit of those dripping garments, hanging like ghosts in the darkness. It swept the deck; emptied the lockers; threw out upon the heaving green to leeward all Jack's store of pipes and boots and tobacco, his tin platters and mess kids, his pantiles and the cockroaches which clustered to gnaw them. It shook them all out as a man shakes from a sack the refuse he discards, then passed foaming into the wilderness—a giant unsoiled, unbroken, solid as a wall.

So the warehouse got herself hove to, and prepared herself to take the chance of what came.

An hour later, dusk fully set, Collins moved from the lee of the dodger and took shelter under the chart-room. Presently a rocket sizzled into the night, then another, and another. Each broke high up, in a cluster of red and blue balls which lighted the ship.

Five minutes later a similar signal spanned the heavens far in the east.

CHAPTER VIII.

SITTING OUT.

I.

The warehouse lay on her beam ends and the gale screamed over her.

Eight bells. Four A.M. A voice which reached nowhere crying out—"Lights bright and all's well!"

Yet the lights were not bright and all was not well with this grain carrier. Perhaps the voice spoke in the singular—who shall say? The gale took charge of it, threw it upon the spume, and the spume smothered it.

It mattered not at all whether the lights were bright

or dull. The warehouse lay on her side moving no-whither. If anything were under way out there, and pointed to hit her, disaster would follow. The warehouse had given up effort: she lay like a buttress across the seas, sagging desperately, catching at straws, the breath punched out of her. Collision at that moment might conceivably have been the swifter method. Five minutes, perhaps three, would suffice—afterwards the lord of the west might have rested.

But now?

Collins stood on the poop, the mate beside him. One had been without sleep for four days, the other since dusk last night. It mattered very little where they were—sleep was impossible. A soldier does not sleep when he is engaged with the enemy—until a bullet or exhaustion brings peace. Then he sleeps quite suddenly, quiet as a shadow. That is the law, and sailors engaged on that other battlefield follow it faithfully.

Besides, when you consider it, downstairs there were women.

Neither Collins nor Jackson would have admitted this additional handicap. They were men in charge of their brothers; a little higher in station, a little more touched by education than those who fought and swore beside them,—that was the sole difference. Therefore they stood up watching an enemy which screamed of triumph, of the approach of a new assault, and criticised the capers they cut in defence.

The warehouse lurched under them filching the seas. A strange beast, called by men sometimes a tank, sometimes a biscuit-tin with rounded ends—but a beast that could not run and could not lie to. A beast which aimed, perhaps, to hide her ugliness from further scandalous suggestion. A beast designed by those who fashioned her to test the endurance of a race of sailors so deeply in the crucible of late, and to prove their incapacity.

Perhaps she was there simply to point to Authority the necessity for change, to remove from the statute-

book that ordinance which had imperilled her, and to suggest other modes of fighting the Germans, the French, and all that band which is clanned together to steal our birthright from us.

Who knows? Collins could not have said. Dog-tired, with eyes which saw and did not see, with ears that heard yet failed to hear, with faculties slowly failing before the rigour of those nights and days of battle, he stood there waiting for dawn. Nothing less, nothing more. Dawn. The light of the sun—that was his necessity.

And as yet there remained four hours of darkness. Four hours in which the lord of the west might have his fling—his eternal, majestic, impersonal fling. Then they would turn and scud.

Would the ship endure four hours' additional hammering? Collins questioned it dully. He questioned in the same breath why, in God's name, he had tried her hove to? And at the back of his mind an answer appeared—"Because she could not run; because the sea ran faster, hammered her, thrashed the life out of her."

Then amidst a turmoil of rifle-fire, the rifle-fire of a sail caught tripping and blowing to ribbons, while the immense fury of a new squall pressed them, there stole through the captain's brain a jumble of thought—contradictory, evasive, alluring, self-incriminatory.

"How did you know she would not run? Because of her antics, because of her stress. But that might have passed. True—and we might have gone with it. And so you may go now,—what holds you from disruption? Nothing. I admit it. Any moment may be our last—any . . ."

His head dropped. He leaned forward on his lashing, and a voice said plainly in his ears—"If it be Thy will, Lord Jesus—if it be Thy will"; then instantly there rose a new note—"Stuff! That was what your wife said, four, eight, . . . twenty hours ago, and you said nothing to discourage the sentiment.

"Asinine!" Collins's voice prevailed here. "A man's

duty lies in fighting, not in bowing to an inscrutable ordinance which has no bearing on the point. The man who does not fight—when others are depending on him—deserves to be flayed."

The word fell fiercely. Collins threw out one hand, pointing. "He deserves to be put on the end of that sheet up there and joggled to death—to be put . . . eh? Did you speak?"

Collins lurched in his lashings and turned a dazed eye on the mate.

"No, sir—thought you called though!"

"No—I said nothing."

Jackson stared past the edge of the dodger.

"It's snowing again," he shouted, "and the main tops'l's gone. Blown clean out of the bolt rope."

"Bolt rope—what bolt rope?"

"Main tops'l, sir."

"Yes, yes, the tops'l—well, we must bend another—at daybreak."

"Right, sir. Yes—it may be necessary," the mate howled back.

"What about the wells—any sign of a suck?"

"Suck, sir? No—not just now."

"Ah. That means some new damage, eh, Jackson?"

"That's how I read it, sir."

Collins moved restlessly in his girdle. "What time is it?" he questioned.

"Nearly half-past four."

Collins nodded. "Yes, yes. I forgot. Stupid—er—send the carpenter to examine hatches . . . fore and aft. Ventilators—everything." He turned to search the darkness, and again the words fell—"God! I wish it was day."

The mate returned from giving the order, and came close to his commander.

"Better go down a bit, sir," he raved. "You are dead-beat. A man can't keep on for ever—not reason."

"For ever—no! You're right there," Collins admitted in a dull shout. "But if I went below—and anything happened, what then?"

Jackson kept silence. He had urged this course before and had been met in the same way. He considered it nonsense for a man to remain on deck when obviously he was unfit, dead with fatigue.

Collins leaned towards him, hammering in his views—"I will tell you what," he announced, and the wind raved to drown the words, "there would be the devil to pay and no pitch hot—if the Board of Trade got wind of it. The devil to pay and no pitch hot!" Collins chuckled, relishing the phrase. "And don't you forget that when you come to command."

He paused, drew himself stiffly erect, glanced to windward, and said, "Er—Jackson; if I should happen to doze, just give me a stir, eh?"

The snow ceased. The men now loomed white against the dark background, and the seas sloshed gamely at the dodger, seeking to wash them down. They pounded steadily at the hatches, but the warehouse sagged on,—pitched at the holes scooped in her path, leaning down to guzzle the crests which towered abeam. And around them were the curtains of the ballroom, drawn close, opaque.

"I wish to God it was light!" said Collins softly; "I wish to God it was day." Then again his head sank and the voices wrangled in his ears.

"Pity you didn't stand firm with that Agent," said one. "What mattered any beating a Dutchman could give to Sir Henry Collins, the Knight of St Voltigern? Man! you are the only living knight in the mercantile marine—they would not have dared to put you out."

"Don't talk nonsense; Filcher does not care two split straws for knights. He requires smart passages and small disbursements. Nothing else counts."

"Nevertheless, I consider it was your duty to try."

"My good friend," a solemn voice here, "it is always worth trying when a chance exists. But there was no chance. The whole weight of the Board of Trade was on their side."

"Who suggested the alteration in the load-line?—answer me that and I've done."

"Who?—why, the shipowners. Lloyd-George wouldn't come to their assistance,—wouldn't help them get rid of the anomalies that are stifling them. Shipping doesn't pay. How can it in face of the competition and this bounty business—how can it? It can't. So we load deeper, and those of us who can't float loaded deep will just be wiped out—as we are getting wiped out. That is the position, my friend, and be damned to you—getting wiped out . . . Now. Off the Horn."

"Ever been in the ballroom before? No. Then how can you give an opinion on it? Fine old jig running outside the curtain now—don't you hear it? And some of them are still tripping to it. For myself, I preferred to sit out—you see my wife and little girl are down there somewhere—and it's my bread and butter although I happen to be Sir Henry Collins: a man can't starve,—what?"

"Bosh! you would not have starved."

"That's a lie, and you know it. Do you suppose shareholders care for a man who can't earn them their dividends—eh . . . er . . . er——?"

"Captain Collins!"

Jackson's voice now, shouting in his ear a new phase. Instantly the man stood alert, listening.

"The bo'sun reports after-hatch cover ripped off—one hatch stove in!"

"Badly?"

"No—but split."

"Bend a new tarpaulin at once."

"Sir—there are no more."

"Then cut up a sail—imperative."

The mate made ready to go. He paused a moment watching his chance, and the captain, noting it, leaned towards him to shout—

"How about the pumps—any sign yet?"

"No, sir—none."

"What time do you make it?"

"Nearly two bells, sir."

"Good! Good!" Captain Collins stared into the wind's eye. He felt the ship lying down under the

weight of that immense side pressure; knew how the water lapped at the lee hatch coamings; that the seas charged, smashed on the bulwarks, drummed on the framework of houses torn by the thrashing they had endured—but he saw nothing. Black darkness shrouded all from the sight of this man who commanded; they were the centre of it, a leaping mass clad in foam, punching at the seas, striving still to mount them—handicapped. Yet when Collins turned to the mate there was no trace in his voice of the stress he endured.

"Make it grog-oh for the hands as soon as you can," he said, "and tell the steward . . . eh? Yes, the steward to bring me a cup of coffee, strong, hot. I'm damnably sleepy—damnably."

Jackson moved off to join the crew, and Collins relapsed. He was dead beat, numb from long standing, his eyes heavy, rimed with salt; yet presently he espied the steward, and reached out with a sigh—"Thank God for that, anyhow," he whispered.

The draught revived him. He sipped it, shielding it from the wind which screamed round the edge of the dodger to filch it. The steward remained clinging to the gear beside him. He was pale. He eyed the sea and his chief narrowly.

"Bad night, sir," he ventured at length.

The captain faced him. "What do you mean? . . . all right below, eh?"

They shouted at each other, turning their heads to catch replies.

"Mrs Collins, sir . . ."

"Well?"

"Fell down, sir. One of those lurches did it—straight off the settee, sir."

"Well?"

"Cut her head open, sir—rather deep."

Collins watched the sea, his lips quivering, his eyes hard. For some minutes he made no sound, then turned on the steward, speaking almost fiercely—

"Have you seen to it?"

"No, sir—Miss Nita . . . I brought what she wanted."

"Quite right—yes . . . er . . . steward."

"Sir?"

Again Collins remained motionless and for some minutes without speech. His eyes had a queer look. He seemed to have forgotten the existence of the man who stood beside him. The steward could not make him out. He was afraid of that look—of the inarticulate movement of lips which said nothing. He shifted his gaze and presently heard a voice saying—

"I can't leave this—before daylight. Don't say so. Only worry her to know I can't come. She would understand, you see. But look here—you shall take a message for me."

A moment he paused, facing the blackness; then came the order—"Go to the chart-room and bring me two rockets—yes, two—not one."

The steward acknowledged that he heard, and moved off wondering.

For three days at this hour he had gone to the chart-room and brought out a rocket. On each morning he had seen one curve up into the night and break in a cluster of blue and red balls. Once he thought he caught sight of an answering signal far astern—but he could not tell. Once, too, three rockets had been fired. That was last night after they hove to, when this unholy lurching commenced—now they were to fire two.

The steward emerged from the chart-room questioning the signification. He handed the tubes and waited.

Collins twisted stiffly from his girdle and crossed the deck. The steward followed him. Again it was five o'clock, and on the stroke of it the captain touched off a rocket. It flew straight, curved in the wind, and broke high over their mast-heads in a cluster of red and blue balls. One minute later a second flared up.

"Watch the horizon out there," said the captain; "I will take this segment." He moved aft.

They stood waiting, one by the chart-room, the other at the compass. Five minutes passed. Then far away,

on the south-eastern horizon, a signal scratched the darkness and broke as theirs had broken in blue and red balls.

Collins paused by the compass, taking its bearing.

"S. 65 E.," he noted. "Tell Mrs Collins the *Magician* has signalled 'All well.'"

Half an hour later they repeated their message, and this time the *Magician* answered with four rockets. But Collins sent no translation below. He moved to the break of the poop, passed a line round his waist, and leaned over the rail. He waited for the day.

In the well beneath Jackson and a group worked gamely, seeking to cover the torn hatch; but the seas swept steadily to and fro—a ceaseless rush of water biting cold, heavy with the swing of the ship. The voices of those stalwarts rose from time to time, and made their way to Collins. Oaths and prayers, threatenings and oburgations—tag ends of sentences in the polyglot phrasing of the merchant sailor when hard beset; and farther forward in the full rush of the seas, men stood lashed at the pumps, swinging the handles, pausing, leaping to escape, and singing.

The ship rolled monotonously—a pendulous and quivering lurch, yard-arms prodding at the leeward slopes, mast-heads sweeping the blackness—and through that splendid chaos came touches of the deathless song of Merchant Jack—

"It's time for us to leave her!"

The parting they had in mind had no bearing on the present. It referred to a moment, sunk deep in the future, when at the dock-side they had tied up this warehouse and handed to the British people the grain for which they clamoured. A moment of supreme happiness for all those who go down to the sea in ships. A moment which hears the mate say—"That will do, men!" and they know they are free to go ashore and be robbed by the harpies who batten on them.

The song rang out—

“The times are hard and the wages small,
Leave her, Johnny, leave her !
There's nothing to do but pull an' haul,
It's time for us to leave her !

Oh ! she will not steer, nor stay, nor wear,
Leave her, Johnny, leave her !
She ships it green and she makes us swear,
It's time for us to leave her !”

Collins leaned there listening, filling in the gaps torn by the gale, noting the minor cadence, the sorrowing lilt; then he turned away and came back once more to his post beneath a dodger on which the sprays drove without ceasing. And again his voice said softly—“I wish to God it was day.”

II.

Seven o'clock. A thin streak low in the north-east, and a greybeard moving by stages down the ballroom. Dark still. Just a flicker of the mercy for which Collins had prayed. Perhaps sufficient to point with detail the sloped sides of that towering shape. It stole through the glimmering dawn as a column of men steal upon an enemy lying behind the mimosa bushes of the desert asleep. Through the wilderness it marched, flanked by night, its centre crested and snatching at the new colouring; a misty yellow, as of the primrose over which has been drawn an emerald glazing. Magnificent seen on canvas, if pigments could find the trick which would depict its luminous glow; wonderful *in esse*, as a specimen of giant force; terrible had the crew grasped that at length some stood in the presence of the pale god who came to claim of them—life.

Mercifully it is not given to man to foresee either the bullet or the knife, and here the rush of that monster left them cold. They were busy fighting. They aimed

to reach the land all love most when they are away from it. "What price a drink at the Lighthouse?" one questioned, swinging drearily at the pump. "Howld yer whisht!" cried another; "wait till I get alongsoide av my girrl!" The pumps claimed the pair, others stood with them; a group still sought to fit the torn hatch; but a curious inclination, a droop, as of one tired, had appeared in the attitude of the warehouse they all footed, and Collins had marked the fact as he stood there waiting for day.

A droop. That figured it precisely. It was the men's attitude, his own, reflected in the ship. It was the note of weariness, of lack of sleep, the note which neither grog nor coffee nor tea can suppress. It stood over them like a shadow.

And out of the greyness there rolled this column, solemnly approaching, spluttering at the summit.

It seemed possible to Collins that a movement of the cargo had caused this new attitude. Perhaps the grain had settled under the influence of the blows they had endured. Perhaps the leak had gained more than they had supposed. It was difficult to arrive at a precise estimate of the depth of water in the hold now that the ship heeled so desperately. It had come during the night. It was new, also it was quite impossible to say how deeply they were hit—before daylight came.

Something moved out there, something which would set the matter straight or rush it out of existence. A hint of its advance fell upon Collins, and he stared round the edge of the dodger.

The graybeard, rising and falling with stupendous momentum, broke, radiating perhaps half a cable to windward. Dead abeam. The warehouse lay in its path, torn, a buttress of flimsy steel, crammed to the hatches with grain. If it struck now the war was over; the enemy lying behind bushes would never again lift head.

Collins gave the note at once—"Up here, all hands! Smart now!" He turned to the helmsman—

"Ease her, there! Don't let her pitch like a log!"

The wheel span round, and the crew scrambled for their stronghold.

"The poop! Up with you!"

They crept along decks sloped like the roof of a house at the verge of which was the gutter filled with foam. They sprang from holdfast to holdfast, and as the ship stooped to meet the column sweeping upon her, some reached, and some fell like apples shaken from a tree.

The column advanced. It caught the warehouse full on those bare plates of hers she lifted to resist it. It struck one smashing blow. Thud! The ship quaked. Minor blows fell sectionally—on the poop, on the fore-castle, on the hatches; all down the bruised side. But the main hurt sufficed. The *Padrone* tilted bodily—tilted and lay there guzzling from the flanks of the enemy which had smitten her.

She lifted a trifle. With an insane attempt at bravado she lurched nearly to her former attitude, and sat with the spume driving over her. She seemed astonished at the ease with which she had recovered, and lolled in the foam, shameless. She lay very still—the spume sizzling on her decks, like soap-bubbles in a bath.

Out there, on her lee side now, the greybeard passed onward, marching to find a new enemy, one more worthy his steel—one from whom it might be possible to filch perhaps fame. And from the edge of the well came the shouts of men, conquered but fighting, full of just wrath.

"She's goin'! The bitch! That's done fer 'er—anyway!" A cry less articulate, bubbling—almost a gurgle—followed, then—

"Give us your fist, sonny! Heigh! you black devil—stand off my . . . Gawd! Out boats! out boats! Look slippery!"

And sharply through the din came the orders of a commander scarcely yet in a position to command—

"Steady there! Steady, men! Get aft!"

He dangled like a plummet at the end of the line which supported his girdle; but the rail to which he had been lashed was gone. The girdle had for its

holdfast something leading to the stars—the ladder perhaps by which he must climb. He was dazed, but he reached the place whence he had been washed, and stood looking at the raving sea. Menacing, inscrutable, it rolled before him.

"Steady!" he cried out. "Get aft here, . . . let me see you!"

The wheel no longer span round. One of those who had twisted it swept past on the side of a roller, throwing up his hands, clutching the air—a marionette from whom came no sound. The other lay in a heap, silent as the shadow of the torn wheel he guarded. The chart-room no longer existed. Swept away. Cleaned off at one cut—levelled to the deck.

The *Padrone* lorded nothing at this moment—least of all herself. She lay guzzling the sea which had conquered her. As a warehouse she was a failure; as a ship, inefficient; as a competitor with the Germans, the French, and all the tribe who stood smiling at her ugliness, she was unfit. She lacked strength. She lacked honest work at the hands of those who built her. She lacked buoyancy, all the attributes of a ship. She was a tank, a biscuit-box rounded at the ends; and the nation which desires cheap grain, cheap cloaks, cheap pots and pans, in order that it may find more spare cash for beer and music-halls, which justifies competition—the fierce, cut-throat competition of modern days—may take her as a sample of the coffins which crawl the world's great waterways that it may live.

III.

"Muster there all hands!"

The men moved to obey. They reached the poop, stared at the shorn coamings which had been the chart-room, examined furtively the wheel, turned an eye forward, and found no solace. They cast strange glances at the man who stood there to command. Some had seen him dangling like a bait while wood

and iron swept past. He seemed to bear a charmed life. Wet. Bruised. But alive and giving orders! It was a miracle.

They crept near, Jackson among them, and answered to their names. Twenty-two remained of the twenty-eight who had sailed from the Golden Gate. Six, therefore, as far as could be seen, was the toll already claimed by the pale god who stood over them. Two from the wheel, four from the main-deck wash—it might have been worse. They stared at their commander, acknowledging it. The gale droned on, an interminable hum from which there was no escape—a hum which already had stilled the voices of those who had passed.

"Men!" said Collins, his lip stiff, "I thank you for what you have done. We've had bad luck—but we are not going to knock under. I heard something just now about boats—well, the boats shall be ready; but understand me, I am the man who gives orders. No one else—is that plain?"

A confused mutter ran through that drenched and shivering crowd; then a voice cried in the greyness, "Sir, we stand by; . . . that was scare—eh, mates? Bloomin' scare——"

"Right—I know it. That is all I have to say."

Collins broke off, glanced into the growing dawn, and added, "Carpenter! sound the wells. Bo'sun, get some hands with you and batten down this . . ."—he turned and pointed to the wrecked chart-room,—“this hole. Some planks if you can find them—settees, cabin table, canvas—anything. But make it safe.

"Sails! get the life-belts. Serve one out to each man, and let him put it on. . . . Mr Jackson!

"Go down below. See Mrs Collins and tell her from me how things are. Ask her to be ready for any emergency, and give her what help she may require.

"Steward, cook—prepare breakfast in the cabin for all hands. Four of you get to the pumps, the rest stay with me."

The men moved off as though they had received

orders which might be looked for on any day and in any circumstances. They were wet to the skin—well, the skipper too was wet. Their house was gutted—the skipper's house was gutted also. They were hungry—the skipper had arranged to feed them. "In the bloomin' cabin, too!" "Whirroo! Get at it, mates!" Those were the phrases which passed as they swang down again into the well and resumed the sloppy onslaught.

The sea swirled still; a snow squall mounted steadily to windward; the lord of the west was busy with his whips—a note of temper regnant. And down there, where the counter slapped at the leaping yeast, Mother Carey's chickens still danced and pirouetted like humming-birds at the end of an elastic string.

Six men, under the captain's directions, climbed to the skids to prepare the two leeward boats. Of the four which originally rested there, two only remained. The men worked in rushes, clinging to the gear when the sea leaped to reach them. Later, Collins, with three helping him, found a sail and cut it small enough to act as a weather cloth in the rigging. They spread it there, and thus aided the ship bowed the sea once more instead of lolling logwise in the trough. Daylight helped them. They could see how to work, what was required. Before it had been necessary to guess.

Had this ship been sound below and less deeply laden, the underwriters might have pocketed their premiums. Had there been no dummy rivets or strained butts, it is conceivable that England would have swallowed that cargo of grain, and the lives of those who had vanished in the ordeal of carrying it would have been acknowledged. Acknowledged, you will understand, by the papers, in small letters far removed from the flaunting headlines which advertise, as an instance, the perils of marrying a deceased wife's sister—but by no other soul. *Vive la bagatelle!* That is England's attitude. *Vive la bagatelle!*

And on the high seas men fight for their lives in the competitive coffins which feed her.

Que voulez-vous?

The carpenter of this grain carrier came swinging from the wells with his sounding-rod. "Uz far uz I can make it, sir," he announced, "there's a matter of nigh on three foot o' watter in 'er belly."

IV.

Daylight was fully come by the time they had prepared the boats and taken a hurried breakfast. The ship lay nearly on her beam-end. She refused to come up, and the seas poured over her with the rush of a cascade. In the wind's eye a yellow squall cloud hung sombrely tinging the seascape. The men moved hurriedly to forestall it. They were fed; some smoked; the boats were ready—they waited now for Collins to return from the cabin, whither a moment ago he had vanished. The pumps stood idle.

Some snow-flakes drove slantwise over the ship, and the wind raised voice—a low moan which the rigging transformed to a shriek. The men crept together in a bunch. "Whirroo!" said one, "it's cowl'd—cowl'd." His teeth chattered on the pipe-stem he sucked. "Phut!" said another; "yer sister's cold." He stared at the grey sea as though he had borrowed the idea from its depths.

Snow drove over them, painting the rigging, the masts, the skeleton houses, and again the wind motif struck chords—a moan which was part scream, a scream which was part moan. The men waited. They looked for an horizon which had vanished, narrowed down to a circle through which the ship seemed to protrude—a pounding V-shaped thing which pawed the air.

"It's comin'," said one of those who smoked; "best send an' 'urry the old man."

"Hold your gas," Jackson ordered. "Give him time. He gave you time, didn't he?"

"Yes—but look . . ."

"Look be damned! We're all in it."

Five minutes had passed since Collins had made his way to the companion and descended. At that moment he entered the room which had been his and saw his wife and Nita cowering in the gloom. He noticed that their feet were tucked up; that water gushed to and fro the deck; that Nita lay on her mother's breast sobbing.

He advanced and touched the girl's dark hair, a thought rushing to stifle him. "It isn't fair game, . . . it isn't fair game." But the words which fell from his lips said plainly—"Bear up, little woman. The *Magician* knows."

Nita sprang to her feet and threw her arms about his neck. One of his encircled her waist, the other his wife's. He stood very composedly with them, linked to them, searching their faces. Speech at that moment seemed superfluous. There was so much to say, so little time to say it. A hint from the plunging ship quickened them, and a half-sobbing cry escaped Nita's lips.

"No! No! . . . not yet! Dad, dad!"

He drew tight the arm which held her; she caught his look and it steadied her.

"Come," he whispered, bending over to kiss them in turn, "we must face it."

"At once, Harry?"

"Yes—they are waiting for us."

Again the quick half-sobbing breath; the closer wrench of circling arms, while the wind note rose and fell and the boom of seas droned in that drum-like space. Then they moved together, joined the men, and got into the places which were theirs.

The squall towered high now. The snow drove horizontally over them. They climbed into the boat carrying rugs and oilskins.

Not easily. Not daintily. Not as one enters a brougham—but fighting, facing the eternal sea, drenched by the spray, disputing with a wind which strove to strip them. So these two women got at length within the canvas shelter which was to carry them whither no man knew.

A bare-headed man, grey and calm, stood on the rail above them. He issued orders telling them, among other things, to lie down. In a confused sense they knew that he was the captain—Dad, one called him; Harry, the other.

They sought to acknowledge the order with a wave of the hand, but suddenly they commenced to slip down, to glide bumpingly, a war of shouts surrounding them, from an immense height—a height which presently towered above them. The boat tilted. Men swore, shouted, raved. It appeared that they stood in some sudden and tremendous peril; that it was necessary to jump, to run, to let go, to do all things at once and in an instant of time. The side stood above them—they swang towards it shuddering. A clang ensued—so violent in effect that they seemed to rebound, to leap swinging through space. Voices yelled, "Fend off there—fend!" They sounded frantic—almost in prayer. Then some one said, "Right!" in a very determined fashion, and again came a clang, a thud that tossed them harshly against the oars. But they remained in the boat. They clung to it, crouching low on the bottom boards, gripping the frames.

A man dangled high overhead. He seemed to lose his grip, and suddenly sprawled in the sea before them. A great cry arose; and above the clamour, piercing it, came orders from that man who stood above them.

They touched water. It leaped over the gunwale; one end of the boat jerked up, the other remained low. Some one shouted, "Cut—quick!" and a whizzing noise ensued. They sank lower. The water rose about them, picked them up, threw them about, dashed them towards that gaunt side which towered like a mountain over them. It was rough. Grass trailed from it, slime, ooze, green stuff which clung. It was spotted with bits of white and black. The white particles were sharp, the black succulent, but standing on end, like stiff slugs.

Sometimes they floated nearly level with the man who ordered events, sometimes he vanished in a backward curve which swept the sky.

Again men dangled overhead, came down swearing. They seemed to leap out together, and some reached the boat swinging on ropes and some from over the side. These crawled up spluttering, their hair smalded over their eyes. Last of all came the grey, tall man. He swang over the foam and horribly near it until some one pulled at him with a boat-hook. Then he wriggled like a fish at the end of a line.

Three minutes, perhaps five, had elapsed since they commenced to slip from that height, and again there arose a clamour—"Out with her! Quick! . . . Back port, pull starboard!" Then tilt, grind; tilt, grind. "Give way all!"

"Thank God! Thank God!"

Apparently something had happened, something which aided them. They never knew.

The *Padrone* lay on her broadside now, the air breaking in sudden jets from her hold.

CHAPTER IX.

GOING HOME.

I.

The boat carried them, bobbing like a cork.

They floated now on the bosom of the sea and found it lumpy, cold—a region of moving hills. Shade of the nation who rules the waves, how hilly they found the sea. They thought they knew their habitat; now they agreed that they never knew it. They thought, too, that it could perform no trick which would astonish them; now they discovered matter for surprise. The sea no longer charged. It rose and fell about them—little hills, big hills, ranges of hills. It lifted them,

threw them down. It seemed content to make them bob. Spluttering and hissing, crashing with a note of wrath in the wilderness, the crests alone moved upon them.

Another thing amazed them. Their horizon had dwindled. Generally it extended no farther than the sides of the hollow in which they floated. Like a cork in a high-sided basin, slippery, difficult to climb, they bobbed and lurched and sat quaking. They looked up, expecting to be crushed. A giant approached, screening them from the wind. It towered above them, spluttering, angry,—yet a more violent oscillation was the sole result. A futile thing. Absurd, when they remembered the force which moved.

They remained uncrushed, but wet to the eyes—shivering. They remained alive, but sodden, lacking warmth—the one essential. The boat rocked, bobbed, pitched, danced on the hills; and the hills rose, rose, rose—yet never reached them. Only the spray accomplished its errand. That made them wet. It came from washing the floes and ice-fields of the Antarctic, cold, intent on numbing. It made them shiver. God! how they shivered as they sat there enduring the first stages, watching the hills which sought to frighten them. The boat shook under them.

They rode at sea-anchor alone. Like a cork bobbing at the end of a line trailed in the rapids, so they faced the hours, Collins steering, holding an oar. Even the solace of rowing was denied them. They could not row—like a ship hove to they lay awaiting the end.

They were alone, because somewhere in that last mad rush the second boat had managed to get herself crushed. The warehouse may have sat upon her. The sea may have buried her—who knows? Only the lord of the west, and he wielded the whip.

Some of those who should have found safety in her escaped, and essayed to reach the boat which held the women. Jackson went down angry, shouting his contempt of those who would thus handicap the skipper. Let 'em jolly-well swim! That was his advice. They

couldn't get wetter swimming than they would if they reached that boat! He damned one who reached and climbed the bow. Then suddenly, it seemed, his fury died. The voices all ceased, and the men sent in their cheques.

Blank cheques to be filled in by the pale god who watched their exit, smiling at the trust they gave to life-belts manifestly unfit.

Collins, too, awoke at this. It seems that he had protested when the life-belts were supplied; that he had objected on the score of their age. They were old—so old that, unburdened by man, they would sink—rotten—fustian—things required by an Act evolved for the harassment of Filcher and Filcher's kind. *Quien sabe?* They carried no man anywhere but to the bottom.

A matter for Filcher's conscience without doubt. A matter, too, for the engineer-surveyor who passed them. A matter for the Ministry of Marine, a department which some day may get itself born from the ashes of the Sphinx regnant now at Whitehall.

So they rode at sea-anchor alone.

A triangular spar, a piece of sailcloth, and a rope held them magically to front the rollers. Along the rope there trailed three bags, made in days of warmth by Mrs Collins, and placed ready by her husband. Oil oozed through the canvas cases, dribbled upon the sea, made curious patterns in blue and mauve and green out there to windward of the boats. That is why the seas only reached them in the form of spray.

An albatross sits quite unfurried on the surface of the heaviest sea; but he rises always at the approach of the crest. If you can kill the crest, then a boat will sit as an albatross sits, and may laugh at the crests. Oil effected this miracle. The boat sat tight,—quivering, it is true, but tight. Only the cold oppressed them, the cold and the wetness.

If only they could have escaped the spray! If only they could have snuggled somewhere out of its reach! God! how good was the warmth of the sun, or the heat of a fire! Never before had Nita understood how com-

pletely essential is warmth. Weeks ago they had been deluged with warmth. They had complained because the sun poured down upon them; now they prayed for it. Nita, holding her mother's hand in hers, whispered that she would be glad to sit in a fire if only one could be got. And Mrs Collins, with slower circulation, slower pulse, with a weight of years to handicap her, smiled at the suggestion. Little, dark-eyed Anita, child of the sun-warmed Pacific slope—how little she knew!

They crouched in the bottom of the boat, resting against Collins's knees. A canvas sheet was drawn over them, but beneath it Mrs Collins was wrapped in a fur-lined cloak, which in happier hours had screened her when she came from the theatre; and Nita, who had no cloak, was snuggled deeply in a guanaco-skin rug—the soft fur touching her. Collins and the men shivered in oilskins already wet. Over them all was the canvas screen, one forward, one aft; but canvas speedily becomes wet, and then it is colder than cloth. So they pushed it back, faced the spray, and the spray fell upon them with a touch of hail. It grew stiff upon them. Their clothes presently appeared to be coated with isinglass—thin stuff which cracked at the touch, cold. Cold of the sort which produces sleep. Cold as the mill which was set to grind them fine.

They became weary. Their eyes were heavy with sleep.

Collins drew the screen over them.

And when all were wet and numbed to the bone the sun went down and left them to the care of the stars, the squalls, the hills which leaped and never reached them—the snow.

At eight o'clock Collins sent up his signal—two rockets, which broke in blue and red balls high overhead; and far off, to leeward still, presently there appeared the answer. Then Collins stooped to draw back the canvas which covered those two he loved, and his voice said—

"Bear up. He is coming. He will be with us by dawn."

Dawn!

That was twelve hours hence. Twelve hours without warmth. Twelve hours with limbs which no longer ached, which had gone to sleep. Only those who have been ground know just how long twelve hours may seem to those in the mill. Yet Nita smiled as she snuggled closer to her mother—closer to the knees against which their shoulders rested, closer—closer. Perhaps she heard. Perhaps she dreamed. Perhaps the dawn would see them moving. Perhaps it would see them still—only God knew.

Somnolent but in torture. A dull aching which kept sleep eternally in the background; which pleaded for sleep, for warmth. A fire? Yes, that was their necessity. A fire to dry the frozen clothes which numbed their limbs, which clogged their faculties, which made them moan now the anæsthetic held them gripped.

II.

Midnight found them clad in white; in garments which sparkled like frosted glass; a solitary speck under the pitiless dome. They had food, they had water. Collins served out rum; but the cold nipped them. Water everywhere, wind snatching at the coverlets, aiming to bite; the frost spangling them. Wind and spray and cold—an urgent trio, producing sleep.

Midnight! Four hours of the grim twelve banished for ever from the sheaf of time. Four hours of rocking, bobbing, leaping; facing the eternal sea with congealing blood; listening to the wind and hearing only the tense humming, as of a chord perpetually twanging, that grew deeper, more sorrowful, like a harp throbbing very far off, unreachable, on the confines of eternity. Four hours done with, forgotten, sent back to the hand of Him who made the world, . . . and eight to face. Eight before that dawn for which some prayed.

A faint cry, not of the wind, not of space; a faint

stir beneath the canvas he watched, and Collins leaned down to listen.

With difficulty he framed words which passed stiffly from his lips—words quite easy to say—"Yes, dear, . . . what is it?"

No answer, pertinent or otherwise, only the croon of one who was dear to him, the pale god at hand.

"Hush! hush!—you should not say it . . . I knew. Of course I knew. How could it be your fault? I would come, you know—would! And there was Nita longing for it. . . . Harry—Harry—Harry!"

He stooped, stroking the icy cheek, drawing it close within his coat, closer, closer. Dear God! how cold was that face he loved.

"Harry—Harry!"

"Marie—my girl!"

No answer. Only the crooning voice, gentle, half-sobbing, as of one who stands beating on a door, pleading for admittance.

He surrendered the oar with which he had held them straight, moved from the position he had occupied all night, and folded her in his arms—close, close in his arms. "Oh God! Not that—not that!" came from his lips. "Marie, look! The dawn's at hand."

He stooped over her, drew Nita more securely against him, strove to screen them with that blanket which was theirs. He unbuttoned his coat and wrapped it about her shoulders. But she was wet, her clothes stiff with a wetness which had gone to sleep. He put his hand down and discovered water on the bottom boards. At this he cried out to those who sat bunched farther forward—"Bale her out—haven't you baled her?"

No one answered. For sixteen hours they had endured. Now they all slept. The icy wind had found them peace—or perhaps it was the pale one who had stooped thus far.

Collins raised his voice again. A ghostly shout; the cry of a child—

"Bale her out, some one. Water on the bottom boards! I say there is—very well . . . bale." He re-

iterated the complaint, "Bale—bale—bale; . . . can't you see—eh?"

It sounded like a dirge.

And the wind made mock of his cry, carrying it through those dim solitudes where ice is born and launched upon a world to block man's passage to the sun.

One of those who lay out there, forward, raised a white face from the coat which had smothered it. He stared at the sea, wagging his head, enormously complaisant. And Collins sat moaning over those two who were his—babbling, too numb for tears.

"Hold up, little ones. My little ones," he whimpered. "Never say die while there's . . . shot in the locker—shot! Stupid simile, that . . . what? Never mind. You know what I mean, eh, don't you? Marie! Marie! Oh, my God!" He bent down, touching her ear, breathing on her. "Marie—are you there . . . are you——"

Suddenly he raised the cold face from his breast and gazed upon it. It lolled heavily back, white, smiling.

"Marie! awake! awake! Child! they will be here at dawn, . . . at dawn. Do you hear—at dawn!"

Again the man who was forward rolled his head sidelong at the sea. He leaned over gulping—a weird sound. He lifted his head again and stared aft. But Collins was watching still that cold mouth which smiled upon him without speech. He turned abruptly. "Nita! Ohé, Nita!"

He stooped over her, touching her shoulder.

"Awake! Awake! Your mother is . . . is——"

The child slept unheeding.

The water lapped curiously at the soft canvas sides of this boat, gurgling at those who slept, leaping to find an entrance; but she ambled at the end of her wharp, jerked upon it, flounced in the trickling oil. She fronted the hills. Devoid at this moment of man's controlling touch, she maintained her cork-like attitude—trailing.

Again Collins turned to the crew, raving his desire—

"Bale her out there! Can't you see I can't move, eh? . . . bale her out . . . all wet—d'you hear?"

The crew slept on. Only the one stirred far in the bows. Then suddenly he leaped erect and stood brandishing arms at the pitiless stars. The boat lurched violently, and Collins espied him.

"Stand still!" he ordered. "Sit down!"

The man shouted with laughter. Shook with it. He climbed on a thwart and stood balanced, amazingly dexterous.

Collins found his revolver.

"Sit down!" he cried out, stern, swift to act in the presence of this peril. "Sit!—do you hear?"

"Sit be gol-dolled—sit yourself! I'm tired of sittin' . . . tired—see . . ."

The man moved aft, lurching over the figures which lay. He maintained his balance on the thwarts, approaching slowly, head thrust out.

"You have whisky!" he shouted. "Give us a drink! A drink—hell! give us a drink . . ."

He paused, swaying above them. The boat rocked. Collins lifted his revolver and fired.

Ping!

The man span in the air—a swift teetotum movement—and lurched sidelong into the sea.

But the boat maintained its place.

Again there was silence.

Collins replaced the revolver, and turned to his wife. She leaned there quite unconscious of the passing of that soul, her face lifted to the stars, smiling. Collins found his flask: apparently the man's words had reminded him. He forced some brandy between the set teeth. For the moment Nita's silence had escaped his memory.

The boat rose and fell, rolled, lurched, gurgled—the spray drove over them, hissing.

Collins bent over his wife's face. That smile surely did not mean . . . No—thank God! The lips opened. The eyes again saw. Like a child she snuggled in his arms.

"Marie!" he cried out,— "Marie! don't leave me—keep up—don't leave me!"

Her fingers tightened on his. "Harry!" she whispered.

He stooped to answer, and again the grip tightened. She looked up, dazed.

"Where . . . where is Nita?"

"Here—beside us, asleep."

"Then Philip has not come yet?"

"No," he assured her gravely; "we must wait for dawn."

She remained silent some minutes, thinking over this, her fingers plucking nervously at his arm.

"Is she warm—is the rug round her?"

"Yes—and asleep. Sound."

"Ah!"

For a space she lay still, her fingers at work, busy with his sleeve. Then again she spoke slowly—"If— if Philip comes, . . . and we are saved, . . . you will let them marry?"

With his lips at her ear he answered, "If it will make you happy, dearest."

"Yes. Thank you. You are very good to me; . . . but keep her warm—keep her warm." She paused; then pressing his arm, questioned with a sudden energy—"Is she in her own room?"

He drew her close.

"Marie! Marie!" he cried out. "For God's sake don't leave me—now."

She lifted her eyes to his, a tired, an unspeakably tired glance, and shook her head. But she seemed to understand, and smiled back at him. "In God's own time, Harry—not before."

She slept. He called her, but she did not wake. She lay still. Cold. Cold.

Collins prepared a new arrangement of the wraps. Stiffly, with labouring breath, he stooped over these two, and drew the canvas under them in thicker folds. Nita had most warmth; he raised her from her nest and placed her beside her mother. He wrapped them both in the guanaco-skin rug, the soft hair next them.

Nita stirred and sleepily asked the time. He told her that dawn was at hand—God's dawn. She slept, content.

Collins drew the canvas over them, lifted them against his knees, and sat on watch.

An hour passed, then again he felt a stir. He was numb now, scarcely able to move. He looked down—Nita asleep, his wife restless. He lifted her in his arms, and again that strange set smile appeared. Tired. Unspeakably tired—yet her lips moved. She was speaking. He bent over, listening—

"Into Thy hands, O Lord . . . into Thy hands . . ."

Those were the words he heard. Nothing more.

Again an hour of silence, of the ceaseless drone of seas marching to blot out the remnant left from the warehouse they had annihilated; then a movement roused Collins from the lethargy which was upon him. Her arms stole higher. One reached his neck. She shivered slightly, as one would who wakes cold in the night. Thereafter she slept.

And in the silence again the pale one reaped.

III.

Five o'clock—but the dawn not yet. Distant as ever to these tired children of the sea—these sufferers who essayed to carry grain in a warehouse to England. The boat still held them safely. With cold persistence she mounted the hills, slid back, made foam tracks, climbed, bowed, bobbed. With cold insistence she avoided blows, kept them safe, and watched the long-drawn fight. Twenty-one hours. It mattered nothing. The dawn was not yet.

A voice rose from the heaped forms which lay in her midst; singing, crooning—a monotonous sound:

“‘Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.’

Agony? Whirroo. That’s M’Neal’s cry. Lord, where’s M’Neal—Ohé, M’Neal!”

Again the singer paused, head thrust out, eyes searching the skyline.

“Nothing. Nothing. ‘And never a saint took pity on my soul in agony.’ Rot! Wrong note—all wrong.

“Ah, God, one sniff of England—
To greet our flesh and blood—
To hear the hansoms slurring
Once more through London mud!
Our towns of wasted honour—
Our streets of lost delight!
How stands the old Lord Warden?
Are Dover cliffs still white?”

“Damn!” said the voice, “that hits it. Kipling, of course. Good man Kipling; . . . but the other! Whirroo, M’Neal! Oh! for the dawn. Heigh! for the dawn, . . . God’s dawn! Where’s Nita? Where’s my little girl—what?”

Silence in the boat; silence while a man, coated and rimed with frost, bent over, plucking the canvas to him; tucking it about the forms that rested beneath and beside him; peeping at a face nestling at his bosom.

Then again the voice broke out, crooning, a lullaby perhaps to the one nursed—

“The dawn! the dawn! the dawn! *O Phosphore redde diem*—Ready the dawn? Ay, ready! *Cur nostram gaudiam moraris* . . .

“*Nostram gaudiam?*” the voice appealed, astonished, grave. “Our joys! What else? I learned that back when I was a boy—a boy. . . . Whirroo! *Nostram gaudiam*—our joys. *Cur*, why, *nostram gaudiam moraris*, do you delay our joys? *Cæsaræ venturum esse!* Cæsar is about to come! Cæsar be damned; . . . it’s the dawn, the dawn, the dawn!”

"Ohé! Stand down there! Sit! D'you hear me?"

Silence. The voice muttering.

"Down, or I shall fire . . . ah! you won't, eh? God! take that, and that, and that!"

The revolver spoke with each cry—Ping! ping! ping!

Apparently the voice was satisfied. Some one sat or lay. It mattered nothing which, for Collins stood up to survey the scene he lorded.

And still the boat carried them, bobbing like a cork.

But Collins stood up, staring into the darkness. He shouted, waved arms. Found his revolver—emptied it and fell back among those forms he had guarded.

At length he too was silent.

And out there in the blackness there moved a giant shape, a monster, lead-coloured, flouncing at the seas under topsails and courses; driving into the greybeards, rainbow hues about her bows.

Her signal lamps stared baldly—red on this side, green on that. From time to time a flare burned over her, throwing up her shape, outlining her rigging. But the monster caught no answer. Nor could she hear. She charged at the seas. The wind roared in her rigging. The spray flew high.

And on her poop two men stood searching the night.

"I could have sworn," said one, "that I caught a gleam out there."

"As like as not," said the other; "I'll no take it upon mysel' to deny the possibeelity."

"Call all hands. Shorten sail. We will wait for day."

Philip and M'Neal stood there watching also for that laggard dawn.

CHAPTER X.

"KIM UP, *MAGICIAN*!"

"M'Neal! M'Neal! Turn out. All hands! It's the *Padrone's* boat, M'Neal—and the ship has gone."

M'Neal sat up in bed and gravely surveyed his young commander.

"The *Padrone's* boats ye'll be meanin'," he suggested, instantly awake to the position.

"Boat! One, M'Neal—and it's full of people. Come on!"

"I'll be with ye," said the mate, "in twa shakes of a lamb's tail." He spoke slowly, without a moment's hesitation, gouging at his eyes and stretching. He picked up his cap, put it on, and broke into a low whistle. It dawned upon him as he moved from the bunk that he was well out of the *Padrone*. Of that one could have no doubt.

Philip slammed the door and made his way on deck shouting for the bo'sun. M'Neal pulled on his boots and followed. He took up the binoculars Philip had left on the rail, cast his eye aloft, and turned to make a detailed examination first of the boat, then of the ship. Three minutes ago he had lain snoring in his bunk—now apparently he was in charge.

The *Magician* lay athwart the sea, plunging and foam-clad despite the dying gale. She was hove to precisely as he had left her three hours ago, and down to leeward, in the position of that flash Philip had descried, and perhaps two cables distant, was the boat—a white speck amidst the tumbling greyness.

A group of men stood swaying at the gig's tackles. They pulled without enthusiasm, without shouting or song; just a note to set the time. They seemed oppressed, perhaps depressed, and M'Neal saw as the gig rose above the rail that she was stove.

Sails crossed over and joined him, his eyes puckered,

solemn as an owl. "'Ee wouldn't wait fer we to drop down," he explained, jerking his thumb to indicate the commander, who still delved in the rope locker; "must lower directly minute he sees what's there, an' bang goes our one an' onlie!"

He paused, staring at the rent side. M'Neal nodded. He was in touch with what had transpired.

"You can't do anyfing wiv a gig in a sea like this. It ud squimy-well bust up any boat as was built; but Conway—'ee knows better. . . . An' so would you know better, an' so would I," Sails added parenthetically, a queer twist in his voice, "if so be you 'ad sighted 'em fust. Lard be good to 'em!"

"Carpss—the hull lot on 'em . . . be the look o' things. An' now 'ee's off, searchin' fer the Lord knows wot. A bread barge likely as anyfing else; . . . eh! see that? Wot price straight-jackets?"

Sails gloomily pointed to Philip, who at that moment emerged from the locker carrying a coil of signal halliard stuff. M'Neal sprang round. Sails did the same. It is a question which of the pair reached first. But Philip made no halt. He passed the line to M'Neal, crying—"Take hold of this and pay it out to me. I'm going to swim."

The two men gasped, and Philip went on. "Thought I could manage it without turning you out—tried the old gig again; but it didn't work. The other boats are too heavy—take a month to get them out. Look after her, M'Neal, and give me plenty of line—see?"

"It's death," said M'Neal sententiously. "Give me hold."

He snatched at the line Philip was knotting about his waist.

"Nonsense! Let go——"

"You are oor skipper," said M'Neal, throwing off his coat. "Give me yoour orders."

"I do," said Philip. "Look after the ship and pay out. Stand by! It's my swim."

He leaped on the rail and clambered to the brace

pennants. M'Neal shrugged his shoulders and wriggled into his coat.

“Of aa' the pervairse pairsons,” he remarked solemnly, “I've met—commend me ta . . .”

He turned to shout, “Stand by there. Up here twa hands. Get a life-buoy along there one of you, a couple of light hauling lines, an' send down to the cook and steward to prepare hot soup—hot, ye jibberin' idiots—hot; an' the rest of ye up aloft with a whip or two—main and muzzen—clear that line!”

Philip was in the water now, swimming straight for the boat, the thin halliards trailing behind him. The *Magician* lay athwart the seas, sheltering him and those he moved to save. In M'Neal's mind there lurked but little doubt. The lad would reach. He was game. His blood was young. He was strong. Nevertheless, it was an ordeal in water as cold as this. Besides, there was the line to drag, and the boat's side to mount at the end of things.

“Ooroo!” cried the sail-maker, “if 'ee doesn't do it—lumme!”

“Garn!” said a voice at his side, “'ee's there.”

But he was not there. He was beyond the reach of aid from any one, perhaps half way, and the sea leaped high before him.

“Hold yer gas!” said the sail-maker, “'ee's not there. An’,” he added a moment later, “'ee's—— Sir,” he turned to M'Neal, “wot's 'ee up to now—eigh, givin' in?”

“He's on his back,” said M'Neal. “Blow oh! Lord send he's not . . . eigh why didna ye let me try it? Phew!” M'Neal mopped his brow. “I wad rather sweem than watch. Stick tae it, lad—stick tae it!”

But Philip was not done. He was, as M'Neal said, resting. A minute or more he lay quiet, then turned, and again fought doggedly onward.

The journey seemed endless, now that he was engaged upon it; the sea, brutal in its efforts to trample him under foot. Cold, rough—all the difficulties jumbled together, conspiring to defeat him. And out there Nita lay! That he swore. She was there and he would

save her; . . . yet she did not raise voice or hand to encourage him. Curious. At that moment the fact struck him thus—then with a swift leap to the other extreme, the thought flashed that she was dead. That, then, was the reason of her silence. She was dead. All were dead—precisely as Sails had suggested while he searched for the line.

He lifted his head and strove to pierce the distance; but he could not see. A crest curled past him, hissing, aiming to fill his ears. He struggled gamely. The task was heavy. The clothes he wore clogged his movements, held him deep when he desired to lift—and it was cold, cold.

He mounted the top of a wave, treading water. The boat was near now—yet no one stirred; no one spoke or gave sign. Philip shouted—"Boat ahoy! ahoy!" and struggled onward; but no answer came to cheer him, only the dead lap, lap of water flicking at the soft canvas skin, seeking an entrance.

He came to the white side of it and clutched the gunwale. It tilted towards him, showing a grim array of heaped forms. A gust of anger swept him. Dead! All dead! He shouted aloud, calling the girl by name, and silence met him. He fought blindly to see, struggling to mount the side. Like a dog, he scrambled at the boat, rising no whit higher; then suddenly it appeared that he wept; that the tears coursed down his cheeks, hot despite the sea. He scrubbed with one cuff at eyes which were crusted with salt—"Of all the dabbled fools!" he expostulated, quaking, "if you aren't . . . blubbering!" It suddenly dawned upon him that some one might hear, and he became very fierce, "Kim up, *Magician!*" he shouted brazenly.

He lifted his hand and discovered that he was striving to climb the rail, when he knew quite well that he should climb the stern. That if he climbed there, he would shoot them all into the sea; that if he didn't hasten to climb somewhere, he would drop off without having again seen that face he loved—without having seen whether Nita was there! God! The fool—wasting

time! The new mood possessed him. He became very earnest, very intent on reaching the boat, on boarding her; he decided that he must see, that it was necessary to make sure—quite sure.

He drew himself along, holding by the gunwale, and reached the stern. He essayed to climb on board. Twice he sprang up, and twice slipped back; but at the third attempt remained poised upon his arms. The boat lurched. He tumbled, rather than climbed, into the stern sheets, and sat there breathless, squeezing the water from his hair and eyes, shivering. He strove to steady his chattering teeth, and moved half blind to see who rested beneath that pile of stiffened canvas.

Collins, white—perhaps dead—lay across the top, his arms limp, his head lolling inert. Philip lifted him aside and dived amidst the canvas, turning it back. Two women were there, white, unconscious—perhaps they too were dead—perhaps . . .

One certainly would never smile again.

Philip held his breath, staring, fascinated. Then suddenly he snatched the girl from her mother's side, taking her beneath the arms, lifting her so that he might see. He wrapped the rug about her—close about her.

Beautiful still. Beautiful despite the cold, the lips that were blue, not red, the flesh which was drawn, tinged with blue, eyes darkened heavily by the pencil of suffering. Beautiful, with the dark grace he knew so well! He caught her to him—half sobbing, "My little girl! my little girl! Not dead . . . oh God! not dead!"

He leaned over her, trying to bring her warmth. He breathed on the cold lips, drawing her to him, kissing her, the tears raining now and unheeded. "Not dead! Not dead!" He rocked her in his arms, crooning over her, and suddenly it seemed that she stirred.

He sat erect, staring into her eyes. A voice crying in the distance said plainly—"Haul in—haul in!" He scarcely heard it, he was so intent on the eyes.

Not a flicker though—not a sign. He stooped with

his ear on her breast. She breathed. She was not dead—the others, perhaps; but Nita lived. He put her down and stood listening. Some one shouted. Who was it? What did they want? Haul? Who wanted to haul? Why should he haul? He drew his sleeve across his face and stared, then suddenly he remembered the ship and looked up.

The men over there were shouting—or were they cheering? Philip waved his hand. No, they were not cheering. M'Neal held the megaphone aloft. It seemed that he said hoarsely—"Haul in—haul in on the line!"

Haul in? Good God! Almost he had forgotten. Brrr! It was cold. He flapped his arms and shouted back—"Kim up, *Magician!* Pay out, pay out!"

The sound of his own voice revived him. He set to work, hauling on the thin line he had brought, and in a few minutes had the end of a stout rope in hand.

Again he shouted, jubilant—"Kim up, *Magician!*" and stumbled, dazed and shaking, with that curious half-sobbing utterance that was so unaccountable, to the bows. Other bodies lay on the bottom boards. He climbed over them, crying, singing, amazingly out of hand, and reached the bows. He stooped, made fast the line, and shouted again—

"Haul in! Haul in! Kim up, *Magician!* Kim up!"

He clambered aft, sat down, and took Nita in his arms. He talked to her gravely.

"My pretty one—look up! Say you knew I should come. Look up; . . . tell me you are glad! Did you want me; . . . did you? Of course you wanted me. And of course I came; . . . wouldn't you have come if I had been out there jobbling in a silly boat? Oh, my girlee, look up—look up—look up!"

But Nita looked nowhither. Her face remained cushioned on his shoulder, and the seas sent spray over them. It strove to steal them even now; to capture them and hold them for its own; to carry them clasped as they were to the caves of the under-world—but the sea failed. The lord of the west was tired.

The pale one perhaps had room for no more at this binding—or perhaps it was that in mercy he stooped to aid.

The boat, drawn by invisible hands, approached the *Magician's* gaunt side. High, rusty, foul, she towered above them—a haven of comfort, a home of magic, a place of safety and delight to some of those who came.

A bronzed and bearded man stood on the rail shouting orders with the tongue of a Scot. His coat was off, his head bare, his diction not easy to follow.

"Haul, laddies—haul! Walk her up . . . Heigh! gae gently there, ye wi' the lang boots. Tend her! Now then—nurse her on that—whisht! Easy does it—easy!"

He paused as the boat drew near, holding up his hand. "Sails, Chips, Bo'sun—come here!"

The men climbed the rail and looked down.

"God save us! They're aa' deed," said M'Neal. "Look at oor skeeper . . . look at Collins. Eigh! look for'ud . . . Steady there! Avast—avast!"

"Sails," he turned about, "Chips—take ye a stand, one at either end. Bo'sun an' me will gae doon an' fend her off—you stand by wi' the ropes an' whips.

"Bo'sun, a rope round ye an' over ye gae. I'll take aft—so, now heave again! Slowly does it!"

He slipped over the side and hung waiting till the boat drew close, then watching his chance, sprang into the stern sheets. The bo'sun followed in the bow. The whips were swung to them; they stooped over the bodies and made them fast. They fended off and worked in rushes. It was a fight—the sea standing to win. Now the boat claimed them; now the whips. The *Magician* rolled ponderously over them, lurching, unstable, steady for no moment of time. The water rushed gurgling along her plates, the boat dived, swerved, fell away, came back with a swing. They worked in peril of being caught, jammed down, crushed by that high steel wall which swayed above their heads; but they won the fight. They sent up Mrs Collins, the captain, and five

men; but Philip, with Nita in his arms, refused to allow the whip to take her from him.

"Hoist the boat!" he cried; "we'll save her too."

So they hooked a yard tackle to the soft-sided thing and walked it to the rail. Here they lashed it, and Philip carried Nita towards the cabin.

"Kim up, *Magician*!"

Again he shouted it, brazenly sobbing as he marched.

CHAPTER XI.

THE *MAGICIAN* MOVES ON.

Four bells. Ten o'clock.

The sun half-way to the zenith, the wind fair, and the bo'sun halting at the break of the poop. He raised his hands and shouted through them.

"Square the yards! Mizzen braces everybody. Muster along! Let's hear from you."

He stood to see the work begun, bristling, immensely important; and the men answering to his appeal, came out and started the jerking trusses. The seas slashed viciously to wash them from their stations. The main-deck, as the ship fell off, speedily assumed its normal condition—a tilting beach with the tide sweeping high across it.

But the men heeded nothing of this. Between them they had accomplished the heroic, and their blood ran generously. They were learning, these sons from the Frisco slums; they could pull together; some of them knew how to sing; now they were ready "to give her beans." That was the phrase registered for the bo'sun to flay, as he stood over them, shouting on the poop.

The bathing-machine owned by Charley Filcher, Ship-owner and Esquire of Dingle Lane, Liverpool, had seen sights. With M'Neal's aid Philip had laughed at them,

and kept her scooting: now, after more sights, she was off again on her guttering progress to feed England.

"Let her have it!" cried the men as they walked the yards square; "shake her out! Who says doughnuts?" They sang banteringly, their hearts full.

The wind had a new song now, and the ship went swaying away before it, dip to port, and a rush of water solemnly pouring; dip to starboard, the water skittering across hatches and decks washed white; hurrying to join forces with the torrent which entered to meet it. They squared the yards. They mounted high on those giddy sticks. They loosed canvas, overhauled gear, came down, and set the sail. The ship acknowledged their touch, and in an hour she was again the bathing-machine, —the rolling, lolloping, punt-ended bathing-machine, set bubbling and squirming across the ballroom floor.

The steward came from the galley loaded with blankets, and halted a moment to escape the wash. The men hailed him as they stood hoisting the main topgallant-sail, laughing at his attitude, his slippers.

"Hello, José—how's things now—perking any?"

"I guess," said the steward, shaking his head, wisely reticent. "You bet!"

"Who?" came the question direct.

"Cap'en Collin' fer one."

"Good! Any one else?"

The steward screwed up his eyes.

"Missy," he suggested. "Leastways, I kinder calc'late, Missy. That's so."

"Bully fer you!" said the chanty-man. "Haul, Shell-backs! Give'er beans!"

They sang drearily to a minor note, and the topgallant-s'l grew quiet aloft. The ship steadied a moment, and José, seizing his opportunity, dashed dry-foot along the spars, leaped past the skids, and reached the cabin entrance.

He entered the lobby jubilant, his blankets dry. He passed at that moment within a few feet of the place which had held Nita on that night in the tropics when she had called for Freddy. On the deck where she had

halted lay two of those who had been taken from the boat. They were frozen stiff, covered already with a flag. In the room where Finch had rested watching the Dago, who appeared to sleep while on guard, Sails and two others leaned over one who lay on the deck. They pumped with his arms.

From the bunk came the muttering cry of a man returning from the land he had entered. He groaned and struck out with his fists.

The steward halted here, crying aloud, "How goes it?" He tossed in some blankets and passed on. There was no necessity to wait an answer. The steward had eyes.

He came to the cabin, opened the door, and entered.

Collins was sitting up, a little dazed still, but alive and rapidly claiming his faculties. He glanced over as the steward appeared, smiled, and said—"That you, Morelos?" Then with a grim attempt at badinage, "Back on the old ship, you see. Got any spare rooms . . . what?"

He climbed to his feet, clinging like a child to the table. A lurch shook him off, and he reached the bulkhead with a crash. He sat down shaking his head. He smiled as M'Neal sprang to help him.

"All right, Mac—see to the others. I'm fit, . . . quite fit," he passed his hands down his legs, rubbing them, wincing at the touch,—“a bit stiff . . . nothing more. Where,” he halted, staring about him,—“where is Mrs Collins?”

M'Neal caught his arm and lifted him towards the settee. He answered nothing.

"She was with us . . . in the boat—when you came—eh, M'Neal?"

M'Neal clung to his arm. They lurched together as the ship rolled. The steward arrived, and together the trio reached the settee. Collins sat down like one whose knee tendons are severed. "She was in the boat," he insisted, "when you came?"

"Sir," said M'Neal, and halted, twisting the phrase, his lips awry.

Collins searched his face. He turned and stared full

into his eyes. He caught his breath, steadied, and said in a new key—

"But you brought her on board—eh, M'Neal? . . . you brought her——"

"Sir," said M'Neal, "we brought her. But she's awa'; . . . she's——" He stuttered, visibly moved, and concluded with a rush, "She's in yon bairth, beside Miss Nita's old one."

Collins drew himself together. "You're sure?" he adventured stiffly, his face grey—grey as the hair at his temples. "You tried restoratives . . ."

"Sure? Ou ay—Gude knows I wad. . . . No, by the Lord, . . . not for——"

M'Neal gave it up.

Collins gripped his arm. "Take me to her," he whispered.

They moved together, Collins with feet that trailed beneath him, that refused to carry him, but silent, stern, very intent on walking without a slip. They came to the door of the room adjoining that from which Nita had watched Philip when he rode the grey mare, and entered.

Collins sat stiffly erect in the chair they placed for him. He made no sign until M'Neal had closed the door, then with a swift movement he slipped to his knees beside the bed.

With his own eyes he saw that M'Neal had spoken from knowledge. His head sank upon his breast. His hands went out to draw her to him. He held her close, staring at the closed eyes.

"You were mine! you were mine!" he whispered, searching her attitude, adjusting small inequalities in the pillow, the bed. "Now you are gone. No—it's not fair game—it's not fair game."

He leaned over the still white form, plucking at the hand which did not respond, and again it seemed that the pale god stood near.

"You could not stay!" came from the straight, set lips. "No. My God! and I'm alone. . . . Alone, Marie! Understand what that means to a man!"

Silence in the cabin. The silence of a room on the lee side of a ship, where the hum of the wind breaks with a diapason note of wailing, and the water gurgling swiftly past fills in the shriller fifes and clarionettes. Silence. Collins bowed, a torn figure of mankind; the white face smiling, quiet as the shadow of him who kneeled.

They remained so still and for so long that M'Neal grew restless. He consulted the steward, approached, and gently opened the door. Collins failed to hear. He leaned there whispering, touching the pale face with his lips, fingering the smooth dark hair.

M'Neal drew back, silent as he had come. He closed the door and sat down, shivering. He questioned why. He was not cold. He was warm. Near at hand a fire burned cheerily: the red light it threw danced nearly to the bulkhead which screened that bed. He remained thinking, his head resting on one hand.

The steward passed through the saloon and entered his pantry. M'Neal heard the movement of crockery as the man pursued his task, and from the state-room, where Philip tended Nita, came the sound of voices. It seemed that one laughed.

M'Neal drew together at this. The thing struck him as curious, inappropriate. It was unfeeling, too. He decided this while scarcely crediting the evidence of his senses. Yet, as it stood in his memory, it rankled. Laughing! A man who had come through the ordeal which Collins had faced was not cured because he had returned to conscious movement and ordered speech. He would require care, nursing; his case was by far the worst of those who still survived, and if the girl in there had any heart she would . . . Again the voice reached him. It certainly laughed.

The note jarred. M'Neal sat up. "I'll stop that," he decided. "Maybe, too, if she could join him it would just . . ." He stood a moment considering, then left the settee. "It's the verra identical," he decided.

He crossed the saloon and knocked. Philip bade him enter, and he opened the door.

Nita lay on the settee covered with rugs; but she was not laughing, she was crying and laughing together, and Philip was bending over her, trying to soothe her. She looked flushed and bonny—the fittest of them all, M'Neal decided. No, she was not laughing—oh no. She was greeting, like her father in yonder. M'Neal halted, plainly disturbed at the position in which he found himself. Nita continued to laugh and cry, her face buried in her hands. M'Neal shuffled in the doorway, but Philip's voice intervened—

"What is it?"

"It's about Cap'n Collins," said M'Neal. "I thought——"

"What about him, Mac?"

Nita lay still. Her shoulders no longer shook; she lay listening.

"Ye see," M'Neal explained, his voice firm now, decisive,—“ye see he asked for Mrs Collins—an' we had tae tell him. Perhaps ower soon, . . . maybe ower soon.”

Nita looked up.

"I'm no sayin'," he addressed the girl now, marveling at the swift change which had come over her,—“I'm no sayin' that there's any danger, but I thought it would be as weel if we could rouse him——”

Nita rose on her elbow, pushed back the wraps. “Yes—yes, . . . I see.” She scrubbed her eyes, stood up, flushed, a little overweighted by one of Philip's coats, and moved from the settee.

“Yes,” she said again, “I understand. Take me to him, please. I am ready. Take me now.”

The men made no remark; they glanced one at the other and led her to the door. They opened it and stood back. Nita advanced and kneeled suddenly beside her father.

“Dad! Dad!” she wailed, her hand on his shoulder.

He turned about, caught her eyes, and fixed them with his own. He said nothing, but he allowed the

white face to slip back upon the pillow, and twisted to catch the girl instead.

With his right hand he held her by the waist, with his left he pointed.

"You see?" he said slowly. "She has gone home. She is dead. She is beautiful even in death—and Filcher killed her.

"Understand," he raised his voice,—“understand my meaning. Filcher killed her in order that he might screw together a few pounds of freight. He knew the risk we ran. He knew we were unfit. He chose to take the risk. And he has killed her. That is the bare truth.

"God! I would that I might meet Filcher at this minute. I pray that I may meet him soon—Amen."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SUBTLETY OF THE BALLROOM.

I.

The wind was failing and hauling steadily to the south. A giant sea rolled up from the west, but it lacked sting; it was shorn of the white-lipped anger of seas writhing under the lash. The greybeards still moved down the ballroom, still jostled the sides of Charley Filcher's bathing-machine, but they broke with a hollow cadence which tells the tale of an exhausted force.

It was four o'clock, and the sails shivered up there in the gloaming as though they feared to face the night. They were wet, black; the whole array hung like boards towering in space. Yet the night gave no sign of wrath, nothing to hint at disaster. It was thinly overcast, in-

clined to haziness, cold, and the dew fell like tears upon the deck.

The signals seemed to foretell a northerly wind—yet it steadily veered to the south, and the scud came down ahead. Perhaps it would settle at south-east, perhaps at east; or it might, during the next twelve hours, stray boldly round to the north, and again blow seriously with rain and a blackness sufficiently intense to halt them. Who knew? Certainly no one definitely, for that would predicate the faculty of divination: still, the signals all pointed to a norther, and the men cared little how soon it came. They were sick of the ballroom. They desired to get home.

Again, as they mouched about sheltering from the rawness, there came a shout from the poop demanding attention to the "Lee fore brace!"

The crew moved dismally to respond. The cry of lee fore brace when ships are in any of the world's whirling-places always means work and wet and misery. It usually rains when the cry goes forth; now had it been raining the men could have been no wetter. Five o'clock. Nearly tea-time. The first dog-watch passing without fiddle or song or jest—nothing of the old-time allurements left; only the work, the wetness, and the sodden oilskins.

The men tackled the business, grumbling. Another twenty-four hours would have put them round Cape Stiff: now, if it came out south-east, the Lord alone knew how long they might have to diddle about straw-hawping on ice-coated braces.

South-east!

Off the Horn as elsewhere an easterly wind is a synonym for dirt, mist, haze. Gale and light air usually alternate; but man may be sure of the haze and mist and rawness. It brings the ice in its train, pushes it up to bar the progress of those who would reach home quickly.

Some dread these floating islands more than the rocks which fence in Tierra del Fuego; some regard them as legendary dangers and are content to sail onward, trust-

ing to a thermometer. In truth, the difference is very small. It lies in colour alone. Diego Ramirez, the East and West Furies, the Milky Way, and all that *cheval de frise* of torn terrain lying at the end of a continent, provide black headstones for those who stumble on them; the bergs provide white.

II.

Seven o'clock. The second dog-watch half spent and no sound yet of fiddle or song or jest in this bathing-machine, which aimed to reach home. The men were in the galley keeping the cook and steward company, and their toes from frost-bite. The boys were in the half-deck. One of them was busy with a scraper cleaning the thick wet ooze from the deck; the others lay in their bunks, booted, with cap on head, ready for emergencies.

The yards were sharp up now, the wind light, and the sails drummed, high aloft, where no man could see. A red sheen hung over the port sidelight, green over that on the starboard side. Cabin and scuttle and door and port were rigidly screened from within. It was black on deck, black with a rawness which nipped. Only one small ray of light appeared: it touched the brass on the wheel, trembling under the hand of the man who steered.

Darkness. Silence. Menace. There is no darkness, nor is there any silence, so deep as that which rests upon a ship when wind and sea and stars have left her while they prepare a new assault. The swell still rolls; she lies quivering, the centre of a scheme which has narrowed to the circumference of a well; and far, far up, miles away in the stillness, there may perchance lurk a sign of what will come. Man searches for that sign and it eludes him. Generally it eludes him.

M'Neal was on deck standing with the bo'sun, whose watch it was. Philip divided his time between the deck and the chart-room, where Collins sat clad in garments

borrowed from all three. Erect, stern, greyer than on those days when as commander he had walked the *Magician's* poop; colder of mien; hugging a new bitterness, he sat there with a chart of the Antarctic spread before him.

For the moment he was alone; and although he held compasses between finger and thumb, he measured nothing, saw nothing, and yet appeared to see. His eyes were fixed in examination of something out there, beyond the white bulkhead: they held commune with some one no other eye could discover. His brow contracted, a deep line over the nose. He seemed to frown. Sometimes with one hand he touched his legs—low down at the ankle.

Philip came in from a visit to the deck and halted beside him. Collins still held the compasses poised, his hand outstretched, yet he did not measure; he smiled. Philip glanced over, saw nothing, and touched his senior's shoulder. "She's breaking off, sir," he said dejectedly.

Collins came back from his reverie and replied—"Yes—I rather expected that. It is a nuisance, though; . . . how's her head?"

"East-north-east," said Philip.

"Hah! South-east."

He mouthed this phrase as though it described in some subtle fashion the idea he had in mind when Philip entered. South-east! The abstract gaze returned. He sat silent, tapping with the compasses on the chart, until he caught Philip watching; then he drew up, and pointing, said—"You see that line?"

Philip acknowledged that he saw.

"Well—that is the ice-track for this season, . . . a pale, grey wash dotted with white. The bergs come up, you know; ice-floes in their train, hummocks, drift-ice. . . . A wind from the south-east naturally pushes them."

Again he sat silent, staring at that line of dots marching from the south to meet the edge of the land. Philip watched him, fascinated; he caught his eye.

Collins turned to the chart. "Only the sweep of the Antarctic keeps clear the passage between the bergs and the Milky Way. Ever heard that name before?"

Philip acknowledged that he had, and alluded to the stars; but Collins interrupted almost fiercely—"No—not stars; rocks. The torn end of a continent; you see them over there," he tapped the chart, "black dots, sentries standing at attention, too numerous to map correctly. They call them the Milky Way—the East and West Furies. Suggestive—what? . . . and down there are the white dots—the bergs torn by gales from the Polar Sea—marching to greet us.

"And follow this—the Antarctic current strikes the coast somewhere about the Gulf of Peñas and becomes two—one part flows north, the other south. See how it falls upon the land and shapes it. The western coast is washed away, only the mountain peaks are left; the heel of South America is twisted by it—immense!

"But when a south-east gale comes over the ice it sets up a surface current which kills the other . . . or deflects it, and the bergs close in.

"I have seen them off Diego Ramirez. I have seen them when I was only just able to scrape between them and the Horn. . . . South-east!"

He leaned on the table with his chin resting in one hand, staring through the white wood of the chart-room, searching the darkness out there which screened them from the world. Philip watched him. The man was so changed, so amazingly alert despite the change. Again he touched him gently.

"Don't you think, sir, it would do you good to rest?" he suggested.

Collins looked up swiftly.

"To rest? My boy, this is heaven. Once I was tired. God! I was tired. Now . . . presently, perhaps presently."

He drummed on the chart.

"Once I was in the ice," he said softly, "and not far

from here. My friend who commanded the *Tartarus* was in it too. Seven days I struggled like a fly in a web, and then I got out. My friend struggled too, . . . but he never got out—crushed, nipped—God knows! These steel tanks rip so swiftly when once they get on the rocks or the bergs. They crack up like glass. In three minutes you have the water about your ears—not like the old-time ships, Devine. Pish! it's a new world, . . . breaking off, eh? South-east!"

On deck the canvas suddenly rippled with the noise of sectional rifle-fire, and Philip passed out to see what chanced. He moved aft, stood by M'Neal, and listened to his views. "South-east? Ou ay! There's little doot it'll come out there—cold too!"

Philip returned to the chart-room, but this time Collins caught a hint of his approach and looked up at once.

"Well?" he questioned.

"Breaking off. She's away again. You were right, sir. It is a head-wind."

"South-east!" Collins emphasised, tapping the chart, his lips set. "Good! We will give it its name. Devine. South-east!"

III.

Twelve o'clock now. M'Neal going below, Philip coming on duty. He entered the chart-room and saw Collins still seated at the table, compasses in hand. Five hours ago he had occupied a precisely similar position, and since then Philip had benefited by four hours' sleep. He came in and paused before his old commander. He noticed that he sat as he had left him—his legs on the settee, pillows holding him in position. He appeared to wince each time the ship rolled heavily, and Philip's eyes acknowledged that he was anxious.

"Won't you go below, sir?" he begged. "Fahlun's berth is prepared, and I could call you if——"

"Fahlun?" Collins interrupted. "No—I won't take Fahlun's bed . . . er . . . by the way, where is Fahlun?"

"Overboard, sir—at least, we suppose he is."

Collins lifted his brows. "Oh! how did that happen?" He expressed surprise neither by word nor gesture; he simply commented on a fact.

"No one knows exactly," Philip replied. "It happened the night we got the sou'-west shift. I was busy, so was M'Neal—we didn't get to bed at all that night, and quite early Fahlun came up and stood beside me. At least, he tried to stand—but he was drunk, nearly mad with it, and there was a squall piping over us. He threatened to do for me, but M'Neal got hold of him, handcuffed him, and stowed him in the sail locker.

"We thought he would be safe there, but he managed to kick his way through the bulkhead, and we suppose he got washed away."

"Hah!" Collins mused. "I remember that Fahlun bet me a hundred dollars he would reach home first."

He leaned forward, staring at the chart—looking straight through it and drumming with the compasses. Philip caught the note and broke in swiftly—"Won't you turn in, sir?—take my bed," he begged.

"Turn in, my boy—what for?" He looked up surprised. "I couldn't sleep if I did. Then why . . . Devine, I want to talk to you. It's quiet enough. Leave the bo'sun with orders to knock if he wants you, and come back."

Philip complied.

"Sit down," said Collins.

Again Philip obeyed without comment.

"Fahlun has won his bet," Collins went on slowly, "but I shall not be able to send him a cheque. The thing is cancelled by the act of God. That is what we insure against at sea. The act of God! But it would be more to the point in these days if we insured against the act of man. The act of God would not figure so frequently if it were not for the act of man. God had

nothing to do with the loss of the *Padrone*. He did not permit it—put aside that subtlety and remember that God sets us down here and leaves us to do our work. That is all.

“Filcher ordained the loss of the *Padrone*. The stupid people who rule us made it possible for Filcher to do as he did. That is the story—the whole story.”

He leaned forward, intensely earnest, tapping from time to time the chart which lay before him.

“I want you to understand this,” he went on. “I think it likely your father may desire the information. It may be that I shall not be . . . be in a position to give it.” He waved his hand, smiling. “Shipmasters seldom are.” He had seen Philip’s look, and had successfully disposed of the suggestion; again he smiled, grimly content.

“You see, the position is a bit involved,” he explained. “And I should like to think that the upshot of this case will be a move among underwriters to prevent its repetition. Sailors and underwriters are the people who suffer. You may leave the sailors out of it. They must suffer always—always; but the underwriter is hit in his pocket. If that doesn’t make him face the music, nothing will. I mean it—nothing will!

“I say that Filcher is responsible. I say that Whitehall made it possible—but neither you nor I, my boy, pretend that either Filcher or Whitehall wilfully cast away the *Padrone*. The case is far more complex than that. Barratry has been accomplished before to-day, and will be again; but this is not barratry—it is competition. See that?”

Philip acknowledged that it was plain. He leaned forward watching and nearly silent, taking notes, perhaps for the first time getting a little behind the scenes.

“Filcher is a shipowner, one of the breed who do so much damage to greater men. He is a rat of the type that flourishes on British stupidity. He knows something of shipping; he has a finger in a repairing shop; dabbles as a director in a firm which outfits ships. In-

directly, therefore, shipping pays Filcher—but his ships don't pay, and his shareholders ask for dividends.

“Filcher tries to provide the dividends, and when an opportunity occurs at a moment when Authority seems to have lost its head, he takes advantage of it. Do you blame him? Of course you do. So do I. But I blame Authority and the British Nation first.

“Take notes of what I have said, Devine, and put them before your father when you get home. Ask him how English ships are to pay if the subsidised ships of France and Germany are run against them. Isn't English competition sufficiently keen! Pish! Tell him that increase of load-line only hurts the sailor. Show him that the trouble lies deeper—that it lies in cheap freights, cheap ships, cheap fittings—the infernal mechanism of a competitive system which is killing not only sailors, but driving our ships off the sea.

“Show him that Filcher—ay, and scores of greater men—try to run ships on the cheap in order that dividends may be found for those shareholders whose money they have sunk. Show him that you can't run ships on the cheap. Show him that it touches his pocket.”

His voice sank. He leaned forward obviously distressed, then facing Philip, continued more calmly—

“Had I been wise, my boy, I should have refused to bring the *Padrone* home. I knew what she was. I did it with my eyes open, because—because skippers in the service of a Board of Directors,” he rolled these words fiercely again, “can very seldom refuse to obey orders.

“Of course, too, you understand this Dutchman, Fahlun, was put in to whip me out. If I had refused to carry that freight I might have gone home broken by a Dutchman. I elected to stand and fight. Mark that! I ought to have remembered there were those in the cabin who could not stand blows. I thought of my reputation, Devine, when I ought to have thought of my wife and child.”

He leaned over the table, fiddling with the compasses.

He watched Philip as he sat in the swing-chair opposite, and noted the strong young face, a singular sternness in his mien.

"I am telling you this," he announced sharply, "because I would persuade you to give up the sea before you get too old to learn some other craft; because I like you—and because you have told me you love my daughter. You understand? You comprehend that I don't want to go out whining—that I wish . . ."

"To go out, sir?" Philip cried, struck from his attitude by the suggestion; the second his memory decided, as he sat there in silence.

"Perhaps," Collins waived, a sarcastic note predominating,—“perhaps I should have said I don't want to go out of my way to whine.”

"You could not whine, sir. You can't believe that I should imagine——"

"Precisely. I have faith in you. Otherwise I should not have spoken."

"My boy!" he leaned forward, a note of entreaty in his voice, "you love Nita still?"

"God knows I love her!" Philip answered steadily.

"And you would marry her?"

The boy sprang to his feet, his eyes alight. "If you will give her to me, sir—ay, to-morrow if I could."

Collins regarded him steadily.

"'Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
'Tis woman's whole existence,'"

he quoted.

"That isn't true, sir—it's my whole existence too."

"Hum!" Collins mused, chin on hand, searching the future.

"Yes; I, too, believe in love, . . . otherwise I should scarcely consider . . . to-morrow, eh? Well—who knows what to-morrow may bring forth? But you give up the sea," he threw out sharply. "That is a compact?"

"I promise you, sir—indeed I hate it. It is not what I expected," he answered hotly.

"No. The *Conway* scarcely prepares one for that.

"Understand me!" Collins resumed, the tone again biting. "I have nothing against the sea—only the conditions of servitude—servitude, mind—which modern ships provide. . . . Pish! it is a game of chess. Sailors are the pawns, the English nation the queen. You may legitimately sacrifice your pawns in order to save your queen. Denny and his crowd call us the bottle-fillers. Well, you have your choice. Either simile is apt."

He sat silent a while, fiddling with the compasses, measuring distances, and making notes—a subterfuge which one even of Philip's calibre might pierce, if not comprehend.

Again he looked up.

"Of course I understand how you happen to have survived," he threw out in that curious staccato tone, which once or twice had appeared before.

"Survived?"

"Well—got through the gale unharmed. You jettisoned cargo—what?"

"Oh yes. Five hundred tons; a long way north. We decided that when we decided to come on."

"Ah! That was wily of you, Devine. Good boy! Never consider your underwriters before your crew. Let them pay. They gamble on our known proclivity for taking risks. Five hundred tons, eh?—well, let them pay. It will touch their pockets."

"I thought you were jettisoning too, sir. We came across any amount of wheat one day. It scared me out of my life," Philip added ruefully.

"Not ours, my boy. I was handicapped. I could not do it."

"Why?"

"Because I had protested against carrying it, and if I had thrown it away too soon they would have said . . . oh, you can guess it would not have helped me.

"Why again? My boy, I am not one of those who care to doctor the log. As a result I could not have proved that it was dangerous. Now I have . . . eh? Yes. I have proved it . . . up to the hilt—up to the hilt!"

He leaned forward, his lips straight, his eyes speaking, his face alight with passion.

"There came a day," he said, "when I wished I had been less scrupulous. When I prayed God to stand by me—to give me one chance. But God gave me my chance in 'Frisco. I refused to take it. Now that we were down here He refused to hear, . . . and a man can't take off hatches to jettison cargo when his ship is dipping her rails at each roll. It isn't sense, . . . and so—er—and so . . . Hah!" he winced and sat erect. "How's her head? . . . South-east!"

Philip rose and went on deck.

Collins leaned forward, and for a moment swayed on the settee, drawing the rugs closer, touching his legs. A curious look came into his eyes—one of expectancy, of question, perhaps of entreaty. They overlapped, ran together; it was impossible to say which predominated, but as Philip returned the expression vanished. Collins glanced up.

"North-east," the boy announced. "Wind quite light, and the sea falling."

"Hah!" said Collins. "We can't go very long north-east, . . . or——" He leaned back, shading his eyes, one hand still fingering the compasses.

"And so," he said slowly, "you love my little girl and would marry her—to-morrow . . . er . . . suppose we sleep on that, eh, Conway? Yes—you may go. I'm tired. Tell the bo'sun to come and help me down."

Ten minutes later Collins sat on the settee in the mate's room—but he did not sleep. He took out a knife and ripped the seams of his trousers from the ankle to the knee. He turned up the thick load of flannels he wore, drew off his stockings. He stooped over, examining the flesh, pinching it, touching it with a needle.

"White," he announced, sternly articulate,—“white, bloodless, insensible—a case for the knife. I must see M'Neal.”

IV.

The early morning watch; nearly coffee-time for the grain carriers, the dawn far distant. A still morning, cold, raw, shrouded in mist, and in the half-deck M'Neal bending over a new task.

Hours ago there had been a consultation of the chiefs of this windjammer, with Collins as specialist, sitting in judgment. His feet were dead, ankles dying. If nothing were done to stop advancing mortification, presently Collins himself would be dead; another of the grain carriers would be put out of sight—but by lingering torment instead of the swift, sharp end for which he always prayed.

They sat in the mate's room discussing the cure, Collins perhaps the calmest of them all. Philip begged for less haste. He thought a passing ship might come to their aid. A fair wind, and in two or three days they could be at the Straits, where mail ships halted and doctors were to be found. But Collins put this aside. It was calm. The ballroom was preparing for a new dance. A south-east gale would keep them jammed perhaps for a week. An easterly—God knows!

M'Neal agreed. All the signs pointed to detention, to the protraction of their waltzing period—and mortification waits for no one.

Inevitable? So it appeared to these three. Impossible? Nothing is impossible at sea. Man is confronted with his burden. He refreshes his memory, sharpens his tools, and sets to work. There is no escape, no side door; besides, in his years of sailorising he has seen things done, has helped to do them, and has a wonderful capacity for imitation.

M'Neal had no qualms on the question of his fitness. He would tackle it if the word went forth, and, barring

accidents, he would be successful. This he admitted as he sat there stroking his beard and watching the face of the man on whom he was to experiment—but he wished Collins had more stamina. He was weak—weak. He required rest—a whole month, then he would be fit for all the cutting he desired. Collins would not wait. "I know," he said. "It's not the first time I have seen frost-bite. Take it in time. I have Filcher to see—get me fit, M'Neal, . . . get me fit."

So in the dim light of a screened moon they carried him to the half-deck, and now M'Neal bent over his task.

Trelanick, the steward, and Freddy were his assistants. One held a sponge, the other a lamp; Trelanick handed and prepared the tools. As an anæsthetist the steward had but little experience, but he was tractable; as an assistant Freddy was useless, but he could hold a lamp as well as the next. He was learning, too, the business which one day he himself must conduct.

Collins lay on an improvised bed, a shutter-like contrivance of planks at which our hospitals would shudder. It rested on the boys' sea-chests. He lay there in a profound stupor, eyes fixed, breathing stertorously; he lay without movement, limp, like a bag half filled with sand. The air was heavy with a curious odour—a blend of carbolic and chloroform, carbolic predominating.

At the side of the plank bed hung two lamps, suspended from the adjacent bunk; at its foot, and slung from the beams, was a large dioptric riding-light. In all its rough-hewn years the boys' quarters had never before been so brilliantly illuminated.

Collins reclined on the boards, his shoulders slightly raised, his legs stripped. Freddy, white to the lips, stood focussing a bull's-eye on one leg. M'Neal stooped over it, bare-armed, handling a tool which gritted under the movement he gave it. A sound, as of water dripping in a pool, accompanied it.

M'Neal sawed.

Overhead, searching the mist, Philip crept about

the poop, a cold sweat on his brow. He noted the glare thrown by the dead-lights over the half-deck—saw that it twisted and flowed away like luminous steam; examined the corresponding dead-lights of the room where Nita slept, and saw they were dark. No gleam anywhere except there where Collins lay; only the solemn drip of moisture falling from aloft—an echo of the sound within.

Darkness, silence, mist on deck; light, movement, speed in the half-deck. Opposite poles. Devine praying for the moment to pass; Collins, with staring eyes, happily unconscious that any one prayed.

He lay on his back muttering; the steward held closer the sponge; Freddy, whiter, more intent than before, pushed nearer, holding the lamp with a grasp that trembled.

M'Neal no longer sawed.

He lifted a red hand and held it towards Treланick—"Cut," he demanded—a mere whisper of sound. The carpenter passed it, and the hand moved back.

M'Neal stooped over the shorn leg, gathering the red flesh, tying the arteries. His lips were set in line, his gaze concentrated, his fingers moving swiftly. From time to time he raised his head and glanced at the steward. The steward, holding the man's pulse, nodded back.

He picked up scissors, snipped the silken fastening, and stooped again, busy with the red flesh. Snip. Snip. Intervals intervening, and amidst it the sound of water dripping in a pool.

M'Neal straightened his back. He plunged his hands in a bucket, and the smell of carbolic became stronger. He bathed the flesh—"mopping up," he termed it, in his beard—and again his voice sounded. "Loose yon lashing."

Treланick released a tourniquet and stood watching. M'Neal bent down—"Light here . . . close," he whispered. Freddy advanced. In his eyes was a scared look quite foreign to him—but he remained steady, instantly obedient.

M'Neal fingered the ties. For some minutes he watched

and sponged; then again he looked up—"Gauze," he demanded, "wool."

He dressed the wound. Silently, without a quiver, M'Neal accomplished this task; then taking the tourniquet from Trelanick, he fastened it about the other leg. He stared at his patient, fingered his pulse, nodded at the steward, and bent down.

Again he took up the knife and stooped, cutting, plunging it in water; again laid aside the knife, and pushing Freddy nearer the bunk, took a fresh tool from Trelanick. Again he sawed.

Collins breathed hard, his face puckered with effort. The steward watched him. M'Neal moved swiftly now. Once more came the cry for gut, for wool, gauze; once more the flow was stopped, and M'Neal free to lift a straight back over the bed.

"That will do," he said. "Take it awa'."

The steward obeyed, and M'Neal came over and seated himself beside his patient. He looked proud. "If any of you," he whispered, "want tae make sure o' frost-bite, fill yoor sea-boots with water an' lie till ye een feel naething. Then come tae me—I'll doctor ye."

Collins breathed less heavily, and M'Neal turned to watch.

"Eigh!" he said softly, "but he's comin' to bonny—bonny."

And from without came the wheezy note of the fog-horn, the ripple of water moving past the ship's gaunt side, the cry of Cape pigeons fighting, like plover in a newly ploughed field, fighting for scraps.

V.

All night the bathing-machine maintained her absurd progress, pointing to the north; but at seven o'clock they wore ship, and the forenoon watch found them gliding through the whiteness, heading nearly south. To the northward lay the rocks; to the southward the bergs.

Until daylight tinged the silence Philip scarcely knew how thick it had become. That there had been mist all night was plain, but how much was by no means plain. The same may be said of the distance travelled. It is very difficult to gauge speed when it falls below three or four knots: a patent log sags, dips under the stress of its own weight; the hand log is only hove once in two hours.

At daylight it became evident that they moved faster than they imagined. The sea was smooth. A long swell rolled up; but the bathing-machine stood serenely poised on even keel. At noon the sun was still obscured. They slipped through a dense white steam, a mist which painted everything and left it white; crusted, sparkling where the eye could follow it, dim where the sails vanished, shorn off the tops.

The air was bitterly cold. Men tramped up and down beating their hands, stamping with their feet, picturing the misery of going aloft to stow those sails they could not see. Flat boards of ice they were now. When the wind headed them they showered thin ice upon the decks. Cold. Raw. "Man! who wouldn't sell a farm and go to sea?" The perennial negation assailed them. No one would sell a farm to go to sea. They walked contemplating their ideal—a crossing and a broom. Those who never before had been at sea, who had come from the derelict lists of San Francisco, squirmed at the fact that they were there now. They decided to put the lawyers on the track of Mr Bloomin' Filcher. They forgot that when they reached home they would be penniless; that Filcher had nothing to do with the press-gang system which had placed them there; that Fahlun, who had, was dead.

Some one struck the bell aft.

Eight silver double strokes resounded in the silence, and the men stood still. They had detected a curiosity. "Ear that?" said Cockney, turning about. No one answered. They stood staring; and on the poop Philip emerged from the chart-room, a pencil between his teeth.

He, too, stood to listen.

The man forward repeated the hour on the forecastle bell—again eight double strokes; heavy booming strokes, and Philip, plainly astonished, marched aft to question M'Neal.

"Did you notice that?" he asked.

"I did—an echo?"

"Yes—but how?"

M'Neal approached the weather rail and looked out. The raw air streamed by him, clinging to his garments, tingling his beard. He turned round. "Strange!" he remarked.

The men, it appeared, were of the same opinion. They lined the rail staring into the driving mist. Philip crossed to the break of the poop and hailed the look-out.

"Forward there!" he shouted.

"Sir?"

"Blow your horn!"

The man obeyed. A single note came down the breeze, discordant, like the bray of a toy trumpet used by the nation's Maffikers.

"I thought so," Philip remarked. "I am sure I should have noticed it if . . ." He raised his voice, "Strike eight bells again—slowly!"

Again there came the strange double stroke, loud, measured by precisely the same intervals, distinct.

"It is an echo," Philip decided; "but you can't have an echo without some solid body to throw back the sound . . . eh, can you, M'Neal?"

"Maybe it's the fog—it's verra thick," said M'Neal. But plainly he was at a loss.

Philip's thoughts reverted to the conversation he had held with Collins. He saw the stern, worn figure pointing to the marching dots and heard his voice—"Once I was in the ice, and not far from here. . . . I struggled like a fly in a web, and then I got out. My friend struggled too, . . . but he never got out—crushed, nipped—God knows!" The idea fastened on the boy's imagination, and he threw out his reading boldly.

"Perhaps it's ice," he said.

M'Neal turned a startled face upon him. "Eigh?" he questioned, "what?"

"Ice."

"Man! Ye're no serious?"

He gazed to windward, striving to pierce the blank wall of fog. He decided the air had a nip in it, that in all probability ice was down there—but . . . He sprang away in a great bustle to prepare a thermometer, to bend it to a line and lower it overside. He looked up at Philip . . . "I ought tae have thought of that," he decided; "it's like me tae forget; . . . on the banks we test every half hour. Ye can never tell there—but here . . ."

He drew the thermometer up and read it. "Ye're right!" he announced. "It's ice."

An hour passed. They saw nothing.

Then suddenly, as it seemed, they noticed that the water was smooth; that the sails, where they could be seen, were scarcely full; that the ship seemed to lie quite still, without movement, still as though she were in dock. Then again there came a breath of air which sent her onward, the froth curling white in her track.

"An' we canna ca' the old man now!" M'Neal decided, searching for light. "We are on oor own, you an' me; an' for the life o' me I . . . whisht! What's yon?"

A bark, a strange, uncanny bark, came down to them, borne on the wet wings of the fog as they stood there puzzled.

"A dog," said Philip.

"Then yonder's a ship," M'Neal decided. "That disposes o' yoor theory. Hail her. How's she goin'?"

They shouted through the megaphone—"Ship ahoy!" And across the silence came a smaller shout, the same words, the same interval—"Ship ahoy!"

"It is ice," Philip decided.

"Gude knows it's like," said M'Neal.

"Call all hands!" said Philip.

"Aft here!" he raised his voice. "Back the main-yard!"

He ran towards the chart-room as M'Neal reached the break of the poop. And as the two moved there came a soft whirring motion, a sensation of climbing a small hill, the upward lift of a bow; Grrrrrrr—

Then the ship stood still, leaning with a small tilt to starboard, asleep amidst the whiteness.

CHAPTER XIII.

BUCK UP!

In the first swift moment of recognition, with the entrance of that grating blow which had flung them sidelong, there was a mad rush for the bows. The braces were dropped; men flung lines over the rail and some swarmed down. It seemed that the ship would turn turtle beneath them.

The crew leaped forward, shouting—"Quick! Lord! she's a tank, . . . she's hit somethin', . . . some bloomin' rock! She's goin'! Get a move on! Gawd look sideways on 'er—move!"

They had heard the echo, the barking of a dog; they had seen the swift movements of officers who presumably knew where they were, and the words leaped out, rugged, torn with passion as they made for their exit.

"Land!" a voice raved, a voice from the fog, low down over that tilted side. "She's ashore—high an' dry. Down with yer!"

Some one had reached *terra incognita*; others were on the verge of descent. The men who had vanished prodded about in the thick, white fog.

"Ice!" they shouted, supremely disdainful. "A

bloomin' field of ice. . . . Gawd knows we ve got . . . p'raps——"

They prodded still, growling, full of invective.

Then, far above them, standing among those who still halted, hurling them back, M'Neal appeared. He shouted angrily—

"A braw crowd!" He raised one arm, shaking a clenched fist. "What like men d'ye ca' yooursel's? Square the main-yard! Get ready the boats! There's a woman on board—an' a seek man or twa. Gaein' tae desairt them? Eigh—gaein' tae desairt them?"

Philip, with Nita clinging to his arm, joined the group and added his voice.

"Steady, my sons!" he cried out. "There's lots of time. I'm going to have a smoke. Awanta! there, you with the curls—yo caree fumar! Heigh! M'Neal, stop that Dago."

They pushed together, Treelanick, Sails, and the bo'sun helping. Freddy, very valiant now that he saw the line his chum had taken, approached and cried out for volunteers to help bring out the sick, and the men stood still. They were abashed. The swift rush of fear was checked. They saw that the ship tilted no more. They saw Philip and M'Neal exchanging nods—one sucking at a pipe, the other holding a lighted match.

"Come on!" Philip shouted. "Who's going to help with the boats?"

"Up wi' ye," M'Neal added, grimly sarcastic,—“up wi' ye an' get along the white-wash. It's ice we're on—not land.”

The men climbed on board. They came in a body to the forecabin, and stood there plainly ashamed.

Cockney blurted, as on another occasion one had blurted to Collins—

"Skear!" he laughed. "Kind o' skear—anyway." He looked about him, frowning. "You know w're we are, I s'pose; . . . we don't. That makes all the bloomin' odds." He turned in the effort of self-justification, throwing out one hand. "Can't see nothin',

. . . not a bloomin' foot, . . . an' there's the dawg barkin'. Thought we'd fetched up in some farmyard."

"But she's not in a farmyard," Philip decided, catching the trend. "I wish she was. But she's still as paint, and there's no wind. She can't go down under us, for, hang it, she's got her head on a pillow—white as snow. Look!"

Some one laughed.

Some one else hoped to Gawd she'd stay there.

Some one else decided that it would be best to get ready the boats, and M'Neal picked him up.

"Right," he cried out; "but as we're here an' the boats are there," he pointed aft, "an' we're aa' men an' not monkeys—why, we'll just gae along an' get ready the whimsies."

This time several joined in laughter.

"Good," Philip decided. "Chips, you stay with me; Sails, Freddy, I want you too. The rest go aft with Mr M'Neal." He turned to Nita, who for a moment had stood apart. "All right, little girl?" he questioned. "You stay too?"

"Please—if I'm not in the way."

"Don't tempt me," Philip smiled back. "It isn't fair."

Nita crept up the sloped forecastle, and they stood together looking out upon the still, white bergs.

"We shall have to explore," Philip decided. "Chips! You go aft and sound the wells, there's a good soul, and take a look into the fore-peak. I don't know where she's resting, but it will be best to see to the fore-peak. Let me know what you make of it as soon as you can."

"Sails! Freddy!" he turned to the others, and they came near. "I want you two to go down there," he pointed over the side, "and find out what you can. Keep a rope about you and don't go far. Take pikes with you—they are aft in the rack—and prod about. But keep within hail."

The pair trudged off to equip, Freddy full of the mystery of this unknown halting-place, plainly ex-

pecting miracles, alert, cheerful; Sails with puckered brow, examining a whistle which Philip lent him. They climbed the rail, swarmed down, and reached the pillow. It was covered with snow, white, unsoiled; but under the snow was something hard. They scraped a hole and found ice. Ice everywhere answered the prod of the boarding-pikes they carried. No miracles—only a torn fragment of the wilderness shrouded in mist.

And on the rail stood Nita and Philip. His arm was about her, her head resting on his shoulder.

"A pretty place I've brought you to now," he whispered, tucking a stray curl within the fur cap she wore.

"I think you might have made it an island while you were about it," she smiled back at him.

"Yes—in the tropics, . . . lots of sun about—and some savages and palms and things——"

"Not too many savages, Phil," she suggested, her eyes lifted, appealing.

"No—perhaps half a dozen . . ."

"I think one would be enough," said Nita.

"Very well. One—Friday."

"And we could build a hut and get a fire to warm ourselves, and heat some of the soup we saved from the wreck——"

"Oh, but we shouldn't want to warm ourselves. It would be the tropics, you know."

"So it would," Nita acknowledged; "I forgot."

"But we would have the hut, little girl—because of the sun. Too much sun is bad for your eyes, and——"

"Do you think it is?" Nita questioned.

"Don't you?"

"No," said Nita, with decision.

And Philip echoed the heresy.

He drew her in his arms and kissed the soft, brave lips. The fog screened them,—the dense white fog which hid them from the sounds out there where Freddy and Sails were prodding and fumbling on *terra incognita*; from the noise made by men who had returned to sanity, and worked like niggers to efface the stain.

It mattered nothing where these two stood; on the

forecastle or the poop, on a berg in the Polar Sea or an island couched in tropic splendour—it was all one. Place lay outside. It did not exist.

"If only it could have been an island in the tropics," Nita adventured after a pause, "the warmth would have made it better for dad." Then, with a tense pause, "Oh, Phil! I had almost forgotten. Have you seen him this morning? Is he better?"

Philip had no word ready at the moment. Perhaps the transition was a little abrupt. He stood looking into her face and saying nothing.

She clung to his arm, a touch of fear in her eyes. "Tell me," she cried. "You must tell me."

"I'm afraid he is not much——"

"Then why may I not see him?" she interrupted, swiftly reading the thought.

"Well—you see he was hit harder than some of the rest. I don't know why," Philip explained cumbrously.

"Phil! is there danger?"

"He is very weak, little girl. No—I hope there is no danger. But this won't help him, and . . ."

"Take me to him," she pleaded. "I must see him."

"You shall, dear—as soon as I can leave . . . Ah! there's Chips."

He hailed him, and Treelanick drew near. He looked solemn; little shreds of bagging clung to his beard, his eyebrows were powdered with grain dust.

"Her wells are dry—bone dry," he remarked; "but then we mustn't forget that she'm by the starn a lump. Her peak's all right. Nare a scratch or bruise zo fur as I c'n zee—but then she'm not restin' on her nose. She'm held fast in the way of the fore-m'st—main tight she'm held."

Philip took this as a signal that they were unhurt and said so, but Treelanick deprecated such optimism.

"Because I zay we'm without buckled plates or torn holes," he explained, "is no reason why we mayn't find holes when we come to find where she'm sittin'."

"I agree," said Philip. "Still, it's good to know she's tight so far."

"There's reason in that, sir," the carpenter conceded; "but I'm not sayin' she'll slide off tight—if so be she ever do slide off."

Nita pressed nearer, her eyes full of tears.

"Take me aft, Phil," she begged. "I must see dad and tell him—perhaps he will be able to help."

"You must not scare him, dearest," Philip insisted as they passed down the ladder. "You must be very careful—promise me that."

"Why—is he so very ill?" she questioned swiftly.

"Yes—and very weak."

"What has made him so weak?"

"Well—you see he lost a lot of . . ."

They halted under the skids, where M'Neal and the men worked preparing the boats. Philip searched for a word to represent the thing lost; but Nita did not quail,—she stood a little apart, her face white, her eyes pleading.

"Yes," she said, "what has he lost?"

"Blood," Philip blurted.

"But why has he lost blood, . . . tell me! Tell me!" she cried, her face flushed, her eyes flashing. "Why—why?"

"Because . . . oh! don't look like that, little girl. We had to do it—it was that or death. There was nothing between——"

She did not flinch.

"It was what, or death?" she asked.

"Amputation," said Philip.

She caught her breath, stood a moment panting, her hands covering her eyes, swaying; then turned and, clinging to Philip, reached the saloon entrance.

"You ought to have told me," she wailed. "Oh, my dear! my dear! I ought to have known."

"We weren't allowed to tell you," Philip whispered, holding her tightly. "Are you sure you are all right, . . . sure you won't scare him, . . . sure of yourself?" He held her as they paused on the doorstep, very much as he had held her in those days when after eight bells she had stolen from her room to say good-night. And

she looked up now as she had looked then, the same faith predominant.

"Quite sure, Phil," she answered steadily. "Yes—quite. Oh, my poor, poor dad. Where is he?"

"In the chief's room—asleep. Buck up, little girl, and don't frighten him. We are all right—safe as houses; so is he. M'Neal's no end of a swell doctor. He's bound to be all right if you buck up."

She looked at him, a swift pathetic glance, and said—"All right, Phil—I'll buck up; never fear."

She crossed the lobby and entered silently. Then Philip retraced his steps and came once more in touch with the things he faced; with frost and snow and ice; with a ship lounging on the edge of them and a youth searching for miracles down there where the whiteness vanished in steam.

As the French have it—"Il a la mer à boire!"

He was going to be busy.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CAPTAIN'S POWER.

I.

Like the generals of a victorious army, Philip and M'Neal were more occupied by the difficulty of dealing with those who had fallen than by apprehensions of danger from the enemy.

At the moment the lord of the winds was asleep—the forces he ordered camped to regain strength. The bathing-machine no longer stooped to meet the rollers, but lay idle, an objective for the ice-birds, the molly-mawks and Cape pigeons which fluttered screaming in the fog.

She lay in a still-born light which scarcely revealed

her shape, the centre of banks of yellow-washed cloud which rolled heavily towards the zenith, like the smoke of a vast furnace. From the east, the west, the north, and south it crept to smother them. Overhead was a glimpse of blue—a blue so faded, so washed-out, as to be nearly white. The birds rose ceaselessly towards that light; the smoke ascended as ceaselessly to tinge it yellow.

Wind dead, swell dead, heavens one vast scheme of rolling yellow; and the *Magician* lolling as a point in that twisting atmosphere as though she, too, would presently take fire and add her mite to the smoke of an expiring universe.

On the rail abreast the fore-hatch were two men who tilted grain sacks out-board. They stooped, took each sack separately, lifted it, and flung it over. Other men standing on stages in the gloom kept them supplied—grain carriers now in all truth. A constant stream passed through their hands, mounted the rail, and fell with a thud on the ice. The birds swerved, screaming in the dust it made, their crops full. Sometimes one seized a piece of sacking and made off, pursued by countless experts at coercion; they returned uttering raucous cries, disdainful but unabashed. They gorged without shame.

Philip, with Sails, Freddy, and Trelandick helping him, was busy constructing, under the lee of a mass of piled ice, a rude timber and canvas shelter. By nightfall they had furnished it with a bed, some stools, a couple of cane lounges, and a table. They added a pile of provisions, and set an oil stove in its midst; then taking to spade work like navvies, heaped snow about it until it resembled the hut of one who permanently lives in the Arctic.

Investigation had shown them that the ice was firm, solid. It might have been a portion of the continent from which the gales had stolen it, so firm and stable was its appearance. Investigation had shown them, too, that if the ship got off it was probable that they would find her damaged—perhaps unable to continue

her voyage. In that event all would take to the ice and await a passing ship. Meanwhile, as it would be difficult, if not impossible, to move a sick man quietly at such a time, Philip and M'Neal decided to bring Collins "ashore" and set him in the hut at nightfall. If the ship got off and failed to float there would be a rush for the boats; there might be a gale of wind, a jostling sea. It was impossible to forecast these things, so they built the shelter, stored it, and brought Collins safely to his bed.

Whether they rested on a berg or on pack-ice no one could say. The fog lay too thickly upon them, the sea was too still; it was conceivable that they were out of their reckoning, and had fallen upon the land. The seals they espied scuttling off into dim crevices, the birds which flew around them, all pointed to the latter theory. But until the fog lifted and they saw the sun, their environment remained debatable.

With the advent of night M'Neal decided that the lightening process had been carried far enough. So the crew climbed up, shook the dust from them, and got one boat lowered and placed ready for instant service on the ice. A ladder was then fastened against the ship's bow and a rope stretched across to the hut. These matters accomplished, the men were sent to supper, anchor watch set both on ship and shore, and lamps placed to mark the way.

Nita sat in one of the deck-chairs within the lighted hut. Freddy, clad like an Eskimo and booted in india-rubber, marched to and fro, the first on guard. Nita had been occupied by many duties, but now she sat watching the lingering shadows, her hands beneath the fur which wrapped her knees. The room was warm and very silent—too silent, perhaps a trifle eerie, for the peace of so young a girl. She drew nearer the bed.

As far as she could discover in that dim light, her father slept. His eyes were closed; he lay without movement, but he did not sleep.

The restless brain, which has stirred mankind from

the brutes and made him king over them, kept Collins alert now, when every nerve should have been at rest. The man who had graduated as a midshipman in Green's, who had spent his life carrying luxuries and food to England, who had never swerved from the splendid traditions of those old clippers he so often bewailed, lay in this strange hutch, broken, at the end of his tether; yet was he not the man to whimper now he faced the great silence.

The thought which pained him and kept him from rest had been forced upon him by the sight of that fair child sitting calmly fashioning garments from materials which would make most women weep and some men laugh. Memories troubled him. The promise he had made to that dear soul who had preceded him at the gates troubled him. He was at the end of his tether. Yet that fact harassed him not at all. The ordeal through which he had passed would not save him. It was ineffectual. Perhaps M'Neal should have cut deeper; perhaps it was vitality that he lacked. *Quien sabe?* M'Neal had his theory.

Collins had no illusions. He knew that he faced death as certainly as he knew that Nita had been busy with her needle and now sat before him immersed in thought. He was at the end of his tether, and Nita, the child his wife had given him in sun-warmed San Francisco bay, must be guarded and made safe.

Nita loved Philip—the boy who had snatched them from the ordeal of the boat. She must not be left alone. A man can fight, struggle for life, if necessary; but a woman is handicapped from birth. Nita loved Philip. The handicap was doubled. A woman in love sees a man through dim glasses—marriage provides her with a lens. She covers his actions in a cloak of her own weaving—marriage strips off the cloak, and leaves him naked. No man ever yet was the flamboyant hero a woman's imagination depicts. He stands on a different plane, that is all—and woman has not reached it. Sometimes he is a man; sometimes he is a fool; sometimes he is a cad with no attribute of manliness other

than that given him by his tailor—but the girl loves him and he is sacrosanct, heroic.

Credula res amor est! The thought stirred in Collins's mind. *Credula res!* Poor little girl! Alone. Alone. . . . So much to do, so very little time to do it—so very little time.

Great drops of sweat stood on the sick man's brow. He put up one hand and removed them. Cold—the touch which comes when one stands at the parting of the ways.

Nita caught the movement and instantly rose to lean over him—a woman for tenderness, despite her years.

"I thought you were sleeping," she whispered. "Are you comfortable, dearest? Can I do anything for you?"

He watched her, his pulses flickering, and smiled back—"Quite comfortable, little woman—better for the rest."

She slid one arm about his neck and rested her cheek on his. In her mind she disputed his reply. If he were better he would scarcely look so wan; he would grow stronger. Three of the men had recovered—and she herself scarcely recognised that she had been unconscious—why then . . .

Collins's voice interrupted the flow—

"Do you still love Philip?" he questioned, watching her.

She glanced up, a sudden flush mantling her, and found him earnest. "Yes, dad—why? Of course I love him." She added, a trifle disconcerted, "I . . . I was thinking of you."

Collins brushed this aside. "You know what love means, to a woman?" he suggested.

"I—I know I love," she countered swiftly.

"And Philip, . . . what does he say?" The voice came weakly, a mere shadow of the voice which once had given orders.

Nita buried her face on the pillow beside his; the clasp about his neck tightened. With her lips she touched his forehead.

"You know," she whispered. "Don't talk. It will make you weaker."

He lay quite still under her hand; passive for some minutes of time—then again came the question—

"Suppose he asked you to marry him, . . . to marry him now—would you consent?"

"He will not ask," she replied, her face still hidden.

"But if he did?"

"He would not, . . . it would be impossible," she decided softly.

"Why?"

She raised her face and looked him in the eyes, searching them, striving to read his meaning—whether he wandered; whether . . . No, she could not read. His eyes told her nothing.

"But we are at sea, dad—at least we are on the ice." She smiled. "And you are ill—too ill to think of anything bothering. Come! let me get you to sleep."

"But if I asked him to speak, little girl?" he persisted.

She leaned suddenly over him. "Oh, but you won't—you won't!"

"It may be necessary," he told her calmly, evenly, without a break.

She stood erect now, the colour gone from face and neck, her eyes wide, tears starting.

"Dad! Dad! Oh, please don't. . . . I want you. I want you. There is no one else—no one, and I can't lose . . ."

She took shelter on the pillow which held him, sobbing, quite unnerved. He passed one hand gently over the dark soft hair, soothing her as just now she had tried to soothe him. Presently the violence of her grief was stayed. She lifted her face, tear-stained, flushed.

"That's horrid of me," she decided, scrubbing at eyes which shone. "I won't cry. You are not going to leave me—and, and . . . oh, dad, I'm such a little fool alone."

The tears ran down her cheeks, her lips trembled despite the decision.

"Are you afraid to be with Philip?" he smiled.

"No—no, . . . I didn't mean that. I love Philip. I love him."

"Then you will marry him—if he asks?"

She looked him in the eyes—a frightened glance, pathetic in its desire for guidance. "If you wish it," she answered, the colour again leaping.

He pressed her hand. "It will give me peace," he said.

She kneeled beside him, her face bowed, her eyes hidden, her hands clasped firmly about his own.

II.

The man was very weak. How poor and crushed and weak only those who have gone through the mill can say. He lay in the small bed, white, torn from the fight, but alert, the brain alive, watchful of all that passed.

He lay there staring at the canvas which screened the door of the hut, listening for the squelch of boots as from time to time the watch drew near. For the moment he was alone, waiting the advent of those he had summoned; and, perhaps, for the first time he recognised that loneliness was unbearable. The silence troubled him. It was complete. He remembered that in comparison the silence of a calm at sea was noise. He missed the squeal of blocks, the grumble of parrels, the flutter of sails. None of these sounds invaded this white solitude. Silence was the dominant factor; no stir, no movement—a land of death; one of the grim points which provide white headstones for those who sleep beneath.

The end approached. Would Nita, Philip, and the others come in time? would he be able when they came, or would he lie, as the snow outside lay, white, inarticulate? He twisted slightly and raised his voice. A faint, faint sound. Pish! weakness, irresolution. He

summoned strength to shout. The silence appalled. He broke it and lay back gasping.

How long he remained thus Collins could not have said. It seemed that he passed through life; that he was embroiled in strife, fought, won, met the girl who was his wife, and with her plunged through difficulties which nearly swamped them both. And out of a chaos of thought there arose the episode of the *Jungefrau*. The poor devils were on the rocks and the surf creamed over them, aiming to wash them from the rigging.

He manned a boat of which M'Neal took charge; but the boat filled. He lowered another, commanded, and with M'Neal's aid brought off men, women, and children—a mad fight, the sea standing to win—a whirl of action; Marie, his wife, leaning out to applaud. And then, in an instant of time, as it appeared, he stood dazed and troubled before his King, England's King, and heard his name pronounced by the one who alone can give it,—“Sir Henry Collins,”—and trembled at the touch of fingers which pinned to his breast “Our new Order—the Star which may be won only by men of the Sea.”

Then far away, at the back of his head, a voice said—“Not mine, sir; not mine alone,” and he stretched out his hand to point to those who had fought with him—M'Neal, Trelandick, Sails, . . . and found M'Neal standing beside him, a hypodermic syringe in hand.

“I verra much doot,” said the Scotsman, “whether it's gude for ye. But it's done an' you're back, . . . you're back.”

Collins lay still. He recognised that again M'Neal had restored him; that he lived; that he had been near—very near. He smiled at the stern blue eyes watching him so imperiously, and said softly, “Yes—I was done. Give me a drink. Finish what you began.”

“I believe it's poison tae ye,” M'Neal asserted,—“just poison.”

A new look came into Collins's eyes. Again he lived, again will controlled his speech, his thoughts. “Poison?” he questioned fiercely. “Would you have me break up

before . . . before,"—he half rose in bed,—“before I can make them one? I'll have it, M'Neal, if I climb for it on my . . . my stumps.”

He fell back, smiling grimly, but panting from his exertion—“For God's sake!” he whispered. “Man! it makes no odds. And,” his voice rose, “I will be fit!”

M'Neal made no further objection. He crossed the hut, produced a bottle of champagne, drew the cork, and handed a filled tumbler. “I'm oppressed,” he said. “I believe it will hurt ye, . . . but I acknowledge yoor deeficulty.”

A flicker of suspense appeared in the cold blue eyes as he watched Collins's swift grip at the glass. Then he stooped to replace the bottles and turned to prop his patient more firmly. He prodded the pillows like one trained to nurse, and the sick man acknowledged his victory—

“Thanks, M'Neal. Yes. That puts new life in me.”

“I doot it,” said M'Neal.

“I mean it. Think I can't feel? Thanks for all you've done for me, and—and will you hold my glass?”

“Whisht!” said M'Neal, “dinna fash yoorself. What I've dune is naething. It's what you're doin'. Ye will-na rest. It's killin' ye.”

“Could you rest,” Collins asked in a new tone, “if you remembered that rest meant crawling, a go-cart for the years that must come?”

M'Neal took the glass and stood watching. He had no answer for the cold thought which followed the words he had heard.

Collins read him and broke the thread—“What time is it?” he asked.

M'Neal consulted his watch—“Twelve o'clock—within a minute.”

“Then they are late.”

“Sir,” said M'Neal, “there gaes the bell. They'll be here. It's quiet, quiet, an' the moon's thinnin' the fog. Would you be late on sic'an occasion—would I? Oh, no—oh, no!”

The ship's bell broke in upon the words; eight double

strokes; the sound which had puzzled these grain carriers out there in the hours which were gone.

Twelve o'clock! Collins stretched out his hand—"My glass, Mac! Pish! don't croak. I must see this through."

He emptied the tumbler and paused, listening. A smile dawned in his eyes. "Good!" he exclaimed, "we timed that well. Back me, M'Neal, . . . and if I fail . . ."

"Sir," said the Scotsman, "I'll back ye if it's only for the sake o' that sweet lass."

Again footsteps were heard squelching through the snow. M'Neal drew back the flap and Philip entered, leading Nita. They came in together; Sails, Trelanick, and Freddy following. M'Neal closed the flap.

Nita and Philip had crossed and now stood beside the bed. Collins, propped by his pillows, sat erect, leaning a trifle towards them. He held out one hand to each, smiling at their scared and silent appeal.

"Little girl," he said quietly, "I promised, while you lay asleep in the boat, to permit your marriage with Philip. I gave that promise at a time which I consider sacred—and I hoped to carry it out, if you both desired it, when we reached home . . ."

His voice fell, but he continued slowly—

"I thought, as we lay in the boat, of one of those old churches in the Strand—near the Law Courts. I sat there once, and when you and I and the mother lay waiting for . . . for the dawn, I remembered. A dim place; very solemn and full of memories. The roar of London sounds like the roar of the sea. Muffled. No wind note—only the sea thundering, twisting, foam-capped. You know it. So do I. So did that dear soul who left us and waits . . . waits for me to carry out my promise."

He glanced at M'Neal.

"For some reason," he smiled, "I am slow at recovery. My doctor here," again he nodded at M'Neal, "says I am worrying. He thinks that is the cause of my—continued weakness. Well, . . . I have been worried. I

have thought that it may not be possible for me to carry out my promise, . . . and so I asked you here, to marry you, . . . and—to get rid of my worry. Selfish, you see, . . . selfish to the——”

His face twisted. He paused abruptly and pressed the hands of the two who faced him, reading his thoughts; questioning in his mind how far they believed him.

“You can never get well if you worry,” he added brazenly, “so I am getting rid of it. Note that, . . . and then . . . er—M’Neal, pass the wine.”

M’Neal obeyed. He produced glasses, opened another bottle, filled and handed one to each. Collins took his and held it towards Philip.

“My boy,” he said, but so faintly that it seemed as if he would collapse, “it is the fashion to jeer at marriage. Don’t heed it. Give the world the lie by your level-headed life. Give God thanks that he made you a man. Remember that without love marriage is hell; . . . with it, it is heaven. . . . Drink to that!”

They obeyed and stood watching, awestruck. The draught revived the failing man. He looked up, again alert—

“Little girl,” he turned to Nita, “don’t forget that a man is quite a stupid animal; . . . that he blunders along and gets there somehow; that he is unlike a woman—he has no tact, he is inconsiderate; but remember, too, that no man has ever done great things in the world without the help of woman. The wife who does not strive to help her husband is worth no thought. . . . Drink to that!”

Again they obeyed. M’Neal replenished the glasses of some, and shook his head; but Collins, once more vigorous, turned to face the men. He spoke with a new force.

“I called you here,” he said, “for a double purpose. I want you to witness this marriage—that is the great thing. To witness it and sign your names in the log.

“I wanted also to show you how great is the power of a British shipmaster, to show you some of the things he may do and one he may not do. He is permitted to act

as doctor, lawyer, parson, and registrar. He may work at all the trades. He may officiate in the ceremonies of the Church; but," he twisted, grimly mouthing the words, "he may not order the loading of his ship."

He raised his glass.

"Nita, Philip, . . . we should not be here now if I had had a voice in the loading of my ship . . . er—drink to that! . . . Wait! No, we will not drink to that; we will drink to you two. Nita, little girl—Philip! A long life to you, and may you be as happy as I once was. That is my prayer. Drink to it!"

He emptied and set down his glass. He seemed for a moment to have lost touch; then Nita leaned forward, kneeling beside the low bed, her face on his shoulder. She rested there, sobbing.

Collins came back at the sound and smoothed the girl's soft hair. He glanced at Philip and said quaintly—"Soon this will be your right, my boy. Alone."

Philip shivered and joined Nita on his knees. They remained silent; the men shuffled with their feet, M'Neal coughed and set down his glass—and, as if this were the signal for which Collins had waited, he looked up and said—

"Philip, wilt thou have this woman for thy wedded wife? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour her, and forsaking . . . all others, keep thee only unto her?"

And Philip answered, "I will."

Slowly Collins turned to Nita, holding her in his arms, drawing one hand over the dark hair.

"Dusk, little girl—dusk . . ." He halted; his eyes closed, and again he forced up the heavy lids. "Nita, will you have this man for your husband? Will you obey, . . . help—love, . . . and forsake all other . . . for him?"

Nita's voice came back, tremulous, charged with tears. "Yes, dad, . . . I will."

Collins looked at the still group standing there in the dim lamp-light. "Who," he asked, "gives this, my child, to be married to—this man?"

He seemed to collapse with the words, and M'Neal

came forward. He touched his arm, and again Collins looked up—will dominant, supreme in spite of the burden he bore.

"Sir," said the Scotsman, visibly in difficulty,—“sir, I gie her tae him, . . . an' may God be good tae them baith.”

His voice quivered. He stood erect, facing his commander, one hand pressed on his beard, one hand nursing a poised elbow. Collins smiled. He drew himself together. “Thank you, M'Neal,” he whispered.

Philip sank lower and put one arm about the girl's waist. His face was hidden. Collins leaned forward too; he signed to M'Neal, and listened as they plighted their troth with voices which thrilled the Scot, who now led.

“I, Philip Devine, take thee, Anita Collins, to be my wedded wife. . . . I, Anita Collins, take thee, Philip, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my troth.”

Collins produced a ring and gave it to Philip. He no longer spoke; he listened. M'Neal took up the service, and the boy's voice rang out as he followed—

“With this ring I thee wed, . . . with my body I thee worship, . . . with all my worldly goods I thee endow. Amen.”

Collins leaned upon his pillows. His eyes were closed. The stillness of the snow-clad land engulfed them. There came the cry of a bird; the stroke of the ship's bell—one o'clock.

It boomed in the wilderness,—a double stroke, resonant, musical,—and Collins started. “Ah!” He smiled at the bowed forms kneeling beside the bed. Then again, “Yes—I fear I kept you.” He took Nita's hand, twisting the ring on her finger, drawing Philip's hand to shield it.

“It was my wife's ring,” he said gently. “My wife's, . . . see that you keep it—unsullied.”

He remained silent so long after this that M'Neal drew near and joined the two who kneeled crouched at the bedside. He signed to the sail-maker, and he, with the others, withdrew. They halted outside the tent door, and again there came the clang of the bell.

Collins glanced up and caught M'Neal bending over him, fingering his pulse.

"The last time," he smiled. "Tired . . . tired!"

M'Neal stood sternly at attention. "Rest ye—rest," he whispered.

He poured out some champagne, and held it out. His hand shook, but Collins put it aside.

"Thanks—no . . . er—it played its part, M'Neal; what——"

He found the hands of the two who kneeled over him.

Down, softly slipping back; inert, following in the path of those who had gone before. Down, stricken; strong no more, nor having the desire for strength; head heavy, heart heavy—weary of the wilderness; hands clasped by those two he had made one . . . tired; so Collins lay waiting the signal which all men must hear.

It came with the dawn.

A touch of light stole across the waste and entered the open flap—a pink flush. It lingered on the man's face. It strove to paint it.

But the greyness remained.

CHAPTER XV.

AD TE, DOMINE!

A small breeze stirred in the darkness; the fog was less dense; the twisting columns of smoke, climbing to reach the funnel, were thinner, more diaphanous.

Twilight as yet on the snow; the last touch of an unseen sun tinging the whiteness, washing it with pink, bringing out the blue shadows, making them deep, cavernous. Twilight; the ship's bell tolling; and down there at the edge of the sea, where the black water lapped at the snow, a boat holding two forms lying side by side. A flag covered them, the emblem of the nation in whose service they had died. The two faces were lifted, white, tinged by the glow.

High above them the boat's sail hung throbbing in the breeze. Only the stem of the boat touched the sea. The water rilled up about it.

Nita and Philip stood together at the edge of the land. They leaned on each other's arms, waiting and listening as M'Neal moved about the boat's side. They watched the men he ordered, and the sun-tinged fog swept past them, making them dim, unreal. The breeze which drove it ruffled their hair.

Around them on every hand was the silence of the desert, the still witchery of a cave buried deep in the bowels of the earth.

M'Neal's voice rose. He stood before them declaiming words which failed to express any meaning to the two who listened. It seemed that he rambled, spoke of death and life in the same connection, expatiated on the fact that we brought nothing into this world, and could certainly carry nothing out. He stood there with the mists rolling past him, holding in one hand the small book from which he read, a strange figure, tall, gaunt, bearded—like the priest of some forgotten creed, risen, filled with mysticism.

He faced about and his voice became plain.

"Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.

"In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succour but of Thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased? . . ."

His voice broke; he continued to read, motioning to the men who were near. They came to the boat, stood over it, and Nita turned and leaned her face on Philip's shoulder.

A new sound came down the wind—the crackling of wood, the sudden roar of an ascending flame. M'Neal's voice became faint, far off. It was lost in the roar.

When next Nita lifted her eyes the glare of a furnace met her. The snow was dyed by it. It fell on the fog in ruddy wisps of colour which leaped upward from the boat. The two who lay there side by side were wreathed in it. The sail pulsed flaming; the ropes which held it aloft showed flickering ribbons of fire; high up at the mast-head a tongue of red rolled twisting in the smoke. It mounted high, whipping the sky like the flame of a wizard enchantment, sinister, foretelling doom. And at the edge of the flame the sea lapped with a note which hissed, spluttering amidst the snow.

The men hung in a group, bare-headed, awestruck, and M'Neal, fronting them, a torch still burning in his hand, stood out in purple shadow against the sizzling background. He no longer declaimed. He appeared angry, impatient; his great height gave menace to his attitude—yet was there no menace in his heart.

Nita no longer dreaded what came. It was there, and she faced the end unfaltering. She looked at Philip, her lips moved; he answered, and together they advanced to the boat.

The men drew back, half in awe half in wonder at

this fair child's control. They saw that her eyes were full of tears, that her face was white despite the glow; they saw that she moved like one in a dream. She loosed Philip's arm and stepped nearer. She kneeled on the snow and buried her face in her hands, her voice ringing clear.

"Our Father who art in heaven . . ."

She glanced round, saw Philip and M'Neal on their knees, and caught the deeper voices of the men as they followed.

"Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done . . . in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our . . . our . . . oh, God! please take them to you . . . and give them my love. . . . For ever and ever. Amen."

"For ever and ever. Amen."

Philip held her. They kneeled together on the snow watching the flames. They saw them gradually wax brighter and more bright; saw them at the plenitude of their reign, leaping, twisting, drawing figures in the clouds, waving messages; . . . saw them fade away, grow dim.

And in the silence of a newly found night the two crept forward, gathered the dust, and returned to the ship.

From the poop, where presently they stood, the boat now looked like a brazier in which a fire still smoulders. Bars of blackness. A flickering glow, tipped with amber, verdigris, blue.

The sea drew coppery rings about the boat's prow, standing charred and twisted in its grip.

CHAPTER XVI.

IF YE BE FIT!

And after the night there came a day when light fell upon this bathing-machine managed by Charley Filoher, which had got herself halted at the edge of the wilderness. Men stood on her decks open-mouthed, awaiting what came.

For hours snow had fallen. A marvellous silence still clung to them—the silence of the world's lone spaces, where man is dwarfed, atomic, the one creeping thing less hardy than the fauna which surround him; where the still white dome stands over him, smiling at his incompetence, his futile strivings, his infantile and absurd expressions of wrath—lulling him with its winds, numbing him with its snows; without mercy or gentleness; with nothing of the soft dalliance of pity, even when he lies conquered.

If ye be fit, then shall ye live; if ye be unfit, then shall ye die. That is the law. Mouthings, posturings, the bent knee, and tearful supplication avail nothing against it without effort. Fate, luck, endurance, the subtle mastery of intelligence—these avail, if man understand their use.

The simoom sweeps over the desert. Typhoon strikes furiously upon the waters. The snow falls, blinds, lulls, blots out all—only a soft mound, infinitesimally lifted from the dead level of the plain, remains. Man lies under it. He is at rest. Others swarm in his path—unflurried, undismayed.

If ye be fit.

The snow fell upon the decks of the *Magician*, and, as though touched by the wand of one learned in the art, she stood arrayed in the drapings of the polar seas. Cold? Not as of the wind. Wet? Not as of the sea.

But holding both balanced, ready in a moment to whip with either.

The men moved about strangely silent. No sound escaped the snow—only at long intervals came the note of the bells, silvery aft, resonant forward. If any spoke the snow smothered the sound. If any laughed there appeared no ripple to wake the stillness. The snow fell softly, like down. All night it fell, and with the first touch of dawn there came a rustling, as of trees waked by a breeze, the thud of heavy masses, a faint sound amidst that soundless desert which had claimed them.

A small wind had stolen over the face of the ice to ruffle the ship's white feathers. She lifted them, quaking. With each moment the sound increased. Some one, watching high above the men, cried out—"Stand by there!" in a voice which appeared strangely hushed in the presence of that vast solitude. The ship awoke.

Men crept out, treading without noise. They halted. It seemed that he who had called upon them stood with uplifted hand to diagnose the breeze. It seemed that suddenly, up there, it had become plain which way it would come and with what force. Footsteps approached the break of the poop, soft, thudding footsteps. M'Neal crept down the ladder, and Philip, leaning over, said—

"Yes—main-yard. Haul the port braces. Dead square."

His voice was not raised despite the urgency.

The men moved noiseless to obey. M'Neal pointed. They gathered up the braces and hauled. Great blobs of snow fell now upon the decks; thin showers tripped from the braces overside. The ship shook as trees shake snow-laden branches at the first touch of wind. Her black habiliments stood out against the whiteness. The men squared the after-yards and again stood waiting, silent—for downstairs Nita slept.

If ye be fit.

Some were fit; others, in the presence of necessity, and led by those who were, essayed the task of fitness.

Philip and M'Neal controlled them. Where Fahlun had found mutiny these two found obedience; where Finch had discovered the necessity for force, these two were content to administer sustenance. A sufficiency of meat and drink, such luxuries as were possible, and an occasional glass of grog, had worked this miracle. They remained short-handed. The ship was still a work-house, the sullen and impoverished barn of competition; but the men aimed to do their utmost, where before they had done their worst.

The yards were dead square. Philip and M'Neal moving now this way, now that, searching the stillness for a sign. The snow had ceased falling, and a yellow-red glow tinged the dim world on which they stood.

Was the fog entirely cleared? Would a breeze come—and if it came would it shake them from this soft white mound which held them? If it did, would they be able to continue their voyage, or would the boats they had prepared presently carry a stiff fragment of their force to show how they had striven? The ice remained. The lords of the west and south were only sleeping. The greybeards in a day would have recovered their swing.

All in the future. Nothing certain but the uncertainty of their tenure. Yet they stood up, unconsciously looking the pale god in the eyes, charged with hope—the subtlest weapon in mankind's armoury.

Light stole up the dark circle which girt them and touched a pinnacle with rose. M'Neal saw it and pointed.

"Yon's a berg," he announced simply. "The fog's thinnin'."

The beauty of that blushing spire perked up against the blue-white dome appealed less than did the fact that the fog was lifting. They saw the berg grow in splendour, watched the light creep down its sides, noted the purple shadows, the hoary whiteness of the base, and all the while they only asked for wind; for the return of that zephyr which apparently had failed; for something to stir them and give them life.

Slowly the wilderness emerged from shadow-land and broke upon their gaze. Not one berg but a dozen, some tall, with minarets and domes; others rounded, flat, square, squat; they moved solemnly on the swell. A field of hummocks appeared out there in the west—before they struck they must have skirted it for miles. Floes, drift-ice, acres of lolling white gave up the secret of their shape. Light came forth and pierced the failing mists, throwing out the shadowy fields and peaks, making brilliant the sombre hummocks at their feet.

Ice and snow. Ice and whiteness; whiteness presently tinged with green and blue of such marvellous radiance that it seemed they faced whole rocks of emerald and sapphire. It lay to the south of them; to the west, and far away on the eastern horizon, the marching bergs loomed boldly purple against the flaming sky.

But M'Neal and Philip were not intent on this. The scheme evolved before them. They noted the wonderful gradations, the glowing colour; but their minds were set upon discovering the extent of the field on which they were stranded.

A group of bergs, it appeared, stood over them, sheltering them from the wind that stirred. They towered up there, white, immense, a barrier bunched upon the packed masses which had halted them. If the *Magician* had come upon them out there where they lifted great blocks of ice sheer from the sea, she would have sunk at the first blow. But she met the floes and climbed upon them, and lay like a smack stranded upon the edge of a shelving beach, with all her sails hung out to dry.

The breeze came up in puffs, increasing in force.

Across there, a berg suddenly lurched and rolled over with a roar. It showed a surface no longer white, no longer pinnacled, but grey, sodden, flat, covered with slime.

The pressure became more noticeable. Instead of silence came the crash of ice falling upon ice, the thunder of grinding masses grown suddenly active; the

cry of seals and birds disturbed in the homes they had found.

Philip approached his friend. "She'll come off," he announced. "She's moving, M'Neal. I'll have to call Ni . . . my—my wife." He stammered over the words, suddenly recognising that he was using them. He moved to the compass, his face flushed. "South!" he exclaimed. "I thought so. We shall back clean off, M'Neal, and I must call . . ."

M'Neal watched him; he made no sign that he understood, that he had noticed his chief's halt on the verge of words so commonplace. He stared across the flats, lifted his hand to feel the wind, and replied, "God send she'll come off, but as for ca'ing Mrs Devine"—he halted here, glancing from under his shaggy brows at the boy—"why, I'd just let her lie. She's got arrears to mak' up, arrears—an' the ship will no move this side o' noon."

Philip accepted the advice in silence.

And at noon the wind came with increased force. It stole in puffs and whirring onslaughts upon the stranded monster. The snow rose with it, powdering her sides, powdering too the trim figure standing so quietly beside Philip, watching and awestruck at the spectacle. It caught the sails spread high up there in the wondrous sunshine, flinging them hard upon mast and backstay. It jiggled the snow from them and left them black, like tar; and the *Magician* lurched and shook and scuffled as a bird with long wings scuffles to rise from the ground.

One o'clock saw this crew resolutely facing the danger of torn plates; trimming the yards, zealous to keep the sails at work. The men moved quietly. The hand of fate stood over them. Again it had snatched a brother, and the solemnity of that last scene on the ice sobered them as perhaps nothing else could.

Nita stood on the poop, her arm linked in Philip's. They watched the towering spread of canvas, noted the ship as she lurched beneath them, but had no

thought of danger. The men were hoisting the upper topgallant-sails, marching round the capstan without song, staring up at those leaning spars.

In mercy the wind came down ahead. In mercy, too, the *Magician* had not climbed far. The wriggling movement she made as the wind rose and fell loosened the ice grip. Each moment she heeled more desperately. Each moment seemed to predicate their last; then with a swift, sliding motion which thrilled her length, the clutch released, and she sat on even keel.

A frenzy struck the men now. The yards were swung, stay-sails and jibs hoisted, held to windward by a crew who suddenly found voice and cheered this bathing-machine, this biscuit-tin with the rounded ends which carried them, twisting on her heel, from the ice.

They worked as men work when the race is one against death; who have stood whole days contemplating it, waiting for it to strike; who have made up their minds that nothing short of a special intervention of Providence can release them, . . . and intervention moved beside them, the hand of the Most High. The men sprang about those snow-clad decks shouting, and with the name of God on their lips—the sailor's prayer. They sang and trimmed yards; they sprang to loose sail, hoisted it, crowed sweating amidst that tangled mass of ice-stiff ropes which aided them. And when there came a moment's leisure, they lined the rail to examine the outlook. Good! Good! The flocs bore well on the quarter. They announced it vigorously in many languages, gutter phrases predominating; then watched, the main-yard backed once more, waiting and silent again, while others searched for signs of torn plates.

Was the ship sound, or was she damaged? would they presently be compelled to return to those drifting islands they had left, or would they move on, continue the fight, and reach home?

The thought steadied them. They stood in a group, watching the carpenter and those to whom he gave messages.

Fore-peak still tight. Wells dry. Aft under the counter, in the lazarette, all sound. No water showing. Not a sign of it. Men passed to and fro announcing it, moving more briskly as hope became assurance. But amidships, where the cargo lay solid on the floor, no one could creep—that was the section they felt in the dark, guessed at.

The wells spoke here, and they maintained a dead level. The ship was quiet. Apparently the plates were unharmed. But for those two in authority on the poop, the minutes dragged. Something of the strain was noticeable among the men; but on Philip and M'Neal the burden rested. That is the privilege of command. If all goes well—good; you may keep your appointment. If all goes ill—good again; you have made room for some other person. That is the law.

Philip glanced over at M'Neal.

"She's sound," he said.

M'Neal turned a dull eye on Philip.

"It's verra like," he answered.

They stood there watching the sounding-rod and listening to the carpenter's opinions. Philip moved to and fro the chart-room door, explaining to Nita, who smiled and accepted opinions she could have given quite as readily. Philip smiled back. He glanced at the sails, stared into the binnacle, and rejoined M'Neal. Above them all were the boats ready for a new trip if need be; provisions stowed, water, sails, tackles hooked, all ready to lift them overside—yet no one gave a thought to the boats.

They waited an hour up there in the clear frostiness, watching each other and listening to reports; then again one said, "She is sound, M'Neal."

The other—

"Oor luck!"

He seemed to deprecate the thing he admitted. But as Philip crossed once more to Nita's side he advanced to the break of the poop and cried out vigorously—

"Sweeng the main-yard there, bo'sun, an' when ye've done wi' it, gie her the muslin. Eevery rag!"

He walked up and down rubbing his hands, jubilant.

Thus, at the end of another hour, the bathing-machine was again under way, tripping to a new dance across the ballroom floor.

Not a simple measure by any means. At times rather complex than simple—for the ice moved with them. They had fallen upon a field of it, got entangled in it, and had to trip it daintily,—often with lifted skirts, sometimes to rest.

Five days they endured, fighting inch by inch through Arctic surroundings. Sometimes the white piled masses crammed down upon them, sometimes opened a space to allow their passage. Snow and sleet and fog and sunshine alternated; the lord of the winds used his whip; but the *Magician*, lighter now than when she came to rest on the ice, laughed at his moods and skirled onward in a halo of spray. She moved under all sail past Cape Stiff, caught the full burden of a southerly gale, and rushed stormily for the sun. Up the long slope, past the region where pamperos whirl and slay, out into the kinder latitudes kissed by the trades.

And at the edge of them, one brilliant dawn, Philip espied a liner buzzing homeward from Brazil. A signal brought her over to see what ailed them, and Philip flag-wagged a message which said concisely what had happened. He sent it to his father, and the liner, slowed beside them to take it in, accepted the mission, kicked with her heels, and at breakfast time figured on the dim horizon as a blotch of smoke.

Philip walked jubilant over this. He told Nita that the ship could not pay; but by these means he thought trouble would be spared; that at all events the underwriters would be able to get square. But M'Neal refused to accept this decision. "One o' them is boond ta be caught," he objected, shaking his head; "naething wull put them all square, . . . an', between us, it wull make

Filcher verra seek. He'll gie us all the sack. He'll say nasty theengs verra gently tae us, an' we'll tell him ta save his gas.

He sighed, and for a moment appeared downcast at the prospect, then glancing quizzically at the two young figures standing before him, he added, "It's all verra weel for you; but I foond nae wife doon yonder; an' I verra much doot if she wad hae taken me if I had foond her—grey hairs, ye see, Mrs Devine,—grey hairs."

"I think," said Nita gently, "that if she knew you as well as we do she would take you, Mr M'Neal."

The Scotsman flushed and stared.

"Hoots!" he exclaimed; "me?"

"You," Nita smiled back, Philip standing by enjoying his friend's confusion.

"Weel, weel," said M'Neal, "there's no sayin' how far a woman may stoop; but . . ."

"It is you who would stoop," Nita flashed quickly. Then with a sudden change of tone, "I shall never forget how good you were to me, or how you worked to save . . . those two dear ones—who are gone . . . or how—and if we can help you when . . ."

M'Neal became restive. He thrust his fingers amidst the hairs of the long beard he wore, twisting them and creating a tangle. He intervened with the firm air of one who had come to a decision.

"It's verra good of ye ta think o' me," he said simply. "But—I'm seek—seek o' the sea. I'll just get hame an',"—he looked about him,—“an' ship in a liner."

"But," Philip objected, "that is the sea too, M'Neal."

"Nay," said the Scotsman; "it's steamboatin'."

He smiled and moved off to examine the binnacle.

The breeze came up to them languorously, hot from the distant land. The sails shivered and clanged on the rigging. The stars looked down on two figures seated on long cane-chairs perched near the rail. The deck shone white under the light they threw; no clouds, shadows very faint, faint as those which rested now on

the two who dreamed—Philip and Nita, castle-building, the world at their feet. Ice in the background of life, snow unthought of, the ballroom with its grim headstones at this moment quite out of knowledge.

A hazardous trip drawing to an end; a wondrous passage; a memorable honeymoon for that pair who had survived. They leaned towards each other in the silence, screened by night.

But far away, in the south, the bergs still marched—white spots upon the grey seas which roll in the half-light of that dim wilderness through which the grain carriers pass.



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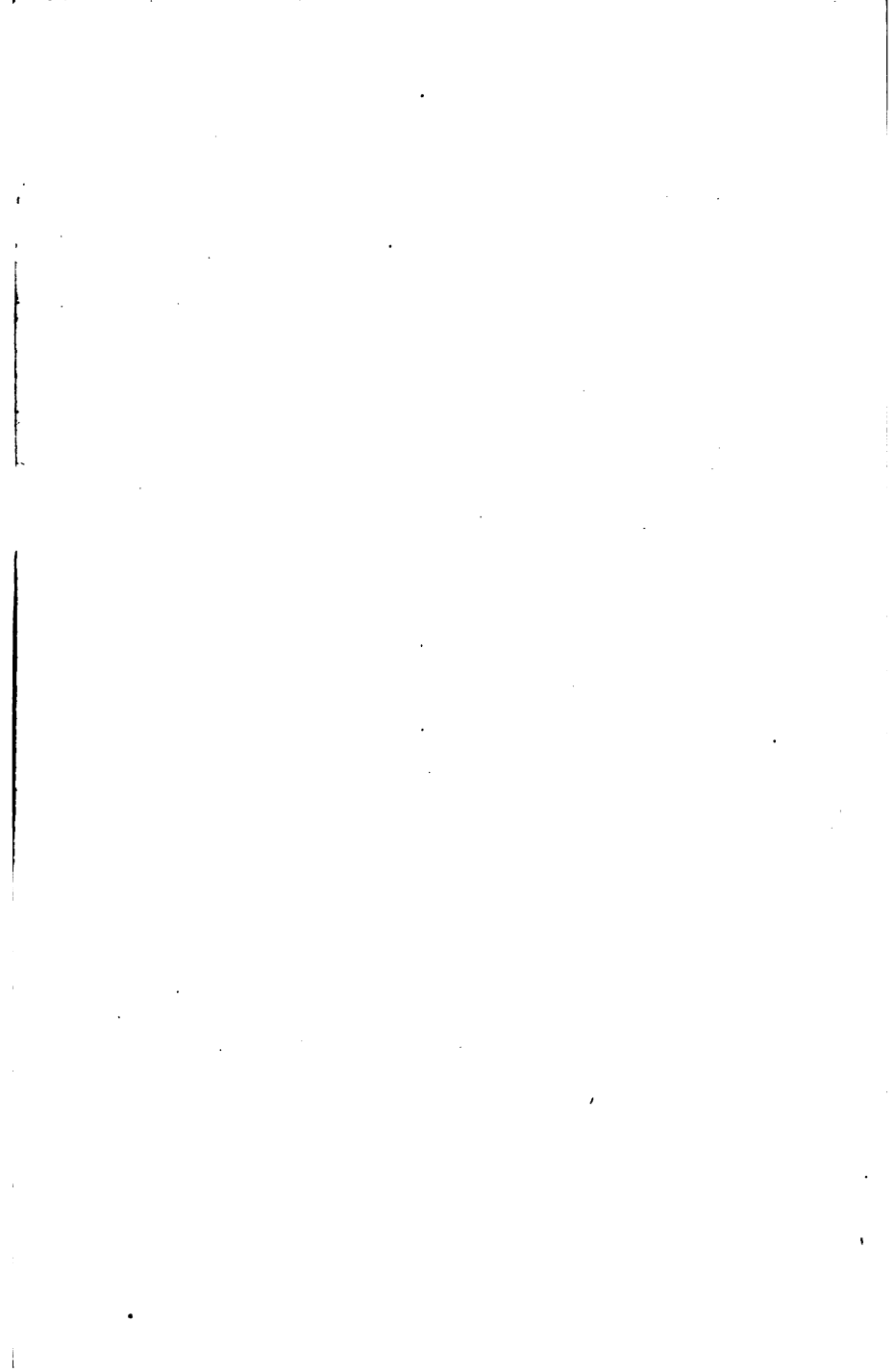
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